

THE PASSION OF CHRIST



“Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” Matt
20:22

“The works of the LORD are great, Studied by all who have pleasure in them” Psalm 111:2

Cover photo: 1st century Mold-Blown drinking cup from Roam Syria, with inscription “εφ.ω.παρει,” from [Eva Marianne Stern](#) *Roman Mold-Blown Glass: The First Through Sixth Centuries* L'ERMA di BRETSCHNEIDER, 1995. pp. 51,97f

“There has recently come to light the remarkable discovery that the words which Jesus used to Judas at the time of the actual Betrayal [ειπεν αυτω εταιρε εφ ω παρει [“Friend, wherefore art thou come?”] (Matt. xxvi. 50) ... ‘Companion, what are you here for?’ were a familiar legend on drinking glasses in the first century and in the East. Thus the speech of Jesus to Judas is history and not editorial fiction: the words were taken off the margin of the glass cup out of which they had drunk together.”

J.R. Harris, *Eucharistic Origins* (Cambridge, 1927), p. 21; referring to the fourth edition of Deissmann's *Licht vom Osten*

"In Jerusalem itself about 40 PERCENT of the Jewish inscriptions from the first century period (before 70 C.E.) ARE IN GREEK. We may assume that most Jewish Jerusalemites who saw the inscriptions *in situ* were able to read them"

"Jewish Funerary Inscriptions -- Most Are in Greek," Pieter W. Van Der Horst, *B.A.R.*, Sept.-Oct.1992, p.48.

PREFACE

This study began with noticing the literal words of Luke the Evangelist; his account of the crucifixion gives a subtle play-on-words lost in most translations:

“And all the people that came together **to that sight, beholding** the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.” [Luke 23:48 _(AV)]

In the Greek, the phrase “to that sight, beholding” is ἐπὶ τὴν θεωρίαν ταύτην θεωροῦντες, and more literally is “upon this spectacle, spectating” or more idiomatically, “as spectators.”¹

Looking at the cultural significance of “spectacle” in the context of “Roman Justice,” the more gruesome and horrific Our Lord’s Passion becomes: not merely the physical suffering and humiliation, but the very idea of His being tortured-to-death transformed into a form of popular entertainment. Examining the historical, sociological, and archaeological evidence regarding crucifixion as “spectacle,” it also became clear that, even from the Roman perspective, every execution was meant to be a profoundly religious ceremony – an expiatory act of “Justice” offered to Divinity. This “redemptive” act was essentially in the form of a “worship service.”

As the religious and ceremonial aspect of this “spectacle” emerged, the theological and spiritual significance for Christianity also became highlighted. The key verse that resonated with new meaning was Paul’s statement:

“Him, who knew no sin, **He hath made Sin** for us: that we might be made the justice of God in him” [2Cor 5:21].

Using a Hebraic double-entendre [also evidenced in the LXX]², Christ became not only the embodiment of humanity’s *chattaah* [**sin**], but also

¹ Compare usage of the same Greek word in 3 Macc 5:24 “The crowds of the city had been assembled for this most pitiful spectacle and they were eagerly waiting for daybreak.” [LXX, NRSV]

became humanity's *chattaah* [sin-offering]. It became clear that there was NO incidental detail of this ritual abuse and humiliation; each was an action toward Christ meeting the criteria of a sin-offering as prescribed by God Himself. Both the Jews and Romans contributed unwittingly to fulfilling every prophetic foreshadowing in the sacrifice-liturgy of the Temple.

And to this end, on the road to Emmaus, the risen Christ gave a life changing Bible study to two disciples ready to wander away in disbelief:

Then he said unto them, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. [Luke 24:25-27]

He did not stop there. Later that evening, he appeared to ten³ of the apostles, and continued the teaching:

And he said unto them, "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were **written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms**, concerning me" Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, "Thus it is written, and thus **it behooved Christ to suffer**, and to rise from the dead the third day:" [24:44-46]

He continued this post-resurrection teaching to crowds as large as 500 at a time [1Cor 15:6], "being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" [Acts 1:3]. Even after the Ascension, Jesus Himself appeared to Paul to teach him from the OT scripture the doctrine of "Christ crucified":

² "But that it may be plainly seen that [for *chattaah*] *sin-offering*, not [merely] *sin*, is the meaning of the word in this verse, I shall set down the places from the *Septuagint* where the word occurs; and where it answers to the Hebrew words already quoted; and where our translators have rendered correctly what they render here incorrectly. In EXODUS, {#Ex 29:14,36}; LEVITICUS, {#Le 4:3,8,20,21,24,25,29,32-34 Le 5:6,7,8,9,11,12 Le 6:17,25,30 Le 7:7,37 Le 8:2,14 Le 9:2,3,7,8,10,15,22 Le 10:16,17,19 Le 12:6,8 Le 14:13,19,22,31 Le 15:15,30 Le 16:3,5,6,9,11,15,25,27 Le 23:19}; NUMBERS, {#Nu 6:11,14,16 Nu 7:16,22,28,34,40,46,52,58,70,76,82,87 Nu 8:8,12 Nu 15:24,25,27 Nu 18:9 Nu 28:15,22 Nu 29:5,11,16,22,25,28,31,34,38}. Besides the above places, it occurs in the same signification, and is properly translated in our version, in the following places:— 2 CHRONICLES, {#2Ch 29:21,23,24}; EZRA, {#Ezr 6:17 Ezr 8:35}; NEHEMIAH, {#Ne 10:33}; JOB, {#Job 1:5}; EZEKIEL, {#Eze 43:19,22,25 Eze 44:27,29 Eze 45:17,19,22,23,25}. In all, one hundred and eight places, which, in the course of my own reading in the *Septuagint*, I have marked." [CLARKE]

³ While Luke & Cleopas testified to the eleven [Luke 24:33], we know from John's account that Thomas excused himself from their company before Christ's appearance that evening [John 20:24]

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that **Christ died** for our sins **according to the scriptures**; 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day **according to the scriptures**” [1Cor 15:3-4].”⁴

Besides the many examples of Apostolic exegesis of OT scripture contained in the NT itself, we have hints of much more:

Heb 5:10 “Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec. 11 Of whom **we have many things to say**, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing” . . . 9:2 “For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. 3 And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; 4 Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant. 5 And over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat; [the meaning] **of which we cannot now speak particularly.**”

That the writer of *Hebrews* did not have time to expound these things in detail does not mean we need despair our lack of transcriptions of these Divine Bible studies. The 1st - 2nd century Apostolic Fathers and Church Fathers give ample testimony of them, and later Fathers have preserved the bulk of this Apostolic exegesis, sometimes even in the systematic form of collected *Testimonia*.⁵ As *WE* read the Gospel accounts in the light of these passages, the sublime significance and prescience of God’s redemptive plan becomes startlingly clear – nothing was left to chance, and everything resonated with meaning . . . there was no length to which Christ did not go to be our Saviour.

⁴ Cp. 1 Cor 11:23 “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you,”

⁵ J.R. Harris showed Justin Martyr was already making extensive use of such *testimonia* [*Testimonies*, University Press, 1916 in 2 vols]; his later contemporary, Melito of Sardis, published the *Eclogae* [Extracts of OT Messianic passages] and the *Clavis* [“Key” of OT symbols & imagery pointing to Christ & NT ministry]; the latter have not survived, but formed the basis for works such as Cyprian’s and Gregory’s *Testimonia*, etc

Chapter 1

Pilate had already arranged to make the Jewish Passover Festival season an occasion for a “celebratory” display of Roman Justice. On the schedule was the **triple-crucifixion** of Barabbas and his two accomplices [Mark 15:7, cp. Luke 23:32, 41]. The gallows were already awaiting the massive influx of pilgrims from near and abroad who would witness the executions as they streamed into city to participate in the Temple sacrifices and ceremonies. The goal of the Temple Hierarchy, however, would be to “highjack” this process, and allow Roman Justice to crush the “Jesus Movement” in the gears of its own machinations.

Rather than appoint a new High Priest (as was the custom of in-coming Roman officials), Pilate chose to maintain Caiaphas [**Luk 3:2**] in this role when he became prefect in AD 26, in a move to promote respect, peace, and continuity; by the time of Christ’s trial, they would have been well accustomed to working with one another’s customs and manners. Caiaphas would act as the “prosecuting attorney” - presenting the case before Pilate in a preliminary hearing, in order to get an expedited indictment, and proceed to a Roman trial.

The Sanhedrin was fulfilling its prophetic role even the night before, as they took him into custody at Gethsemane. As John Gill points out:
“hereby the types of him were fulfilled, as the binding of Isaac, when his father was going to offer him up, and the binding of the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar: who that has read the ceremonies of the **sheaf of the firstfruits**,⁶ but must call them to mind, **upon reading this account of the apprehension and binding of Christ**, and leading him to the high priest? This sheaf was fetched from

⁶ 1Clem 24:1 Wherefore He made the Lord Jesus Christ the firstfruits [=wave-sheaf offering on Sunday] when He raised Him from the dead. Barnabas 15:9 Therefore we the 8th day[=wave-sheaf offering on Sunday] for rejoicing, in which also Jesus rose from the dead

places the nearest to Jerusalem, particularly from the fields of Kidron: the manner was this “the messengers of the **Sanhedrim** went out (from Jerusalem) on the evening of the feast day (the sixteenth of Nisan, and over the brook Kidron to the adjacent fields), and **bound the standing corn** in bundles, that it might be the easier reaped; and all the neighbouring cities gathered together there, that it might be reaped in great pomp; and **when it was dark** ... they reap it, and put it into the baskets, and **bring it to the court**, where they dry it at the fire (cp. John 18:18).” (m. *Menachot* c. 10. sect. 2,3,4);....**So the officers of the high priest, with others, pass over the brook Kidron, with lanterns, torches, and weapons; in the night go into a garden there apprehend Jesus; questions and answers pass between them there; then they lay hold on him, bind him, and bring him to the high priest.**”

The arrest itself had become a spectacle:

“Then the **Band** [=600-1000 men!] and **the Captain** [“commander of a thousand”⁷] and **Officers** of the Jews took Jesus, and bound Him.” (John 18:12)

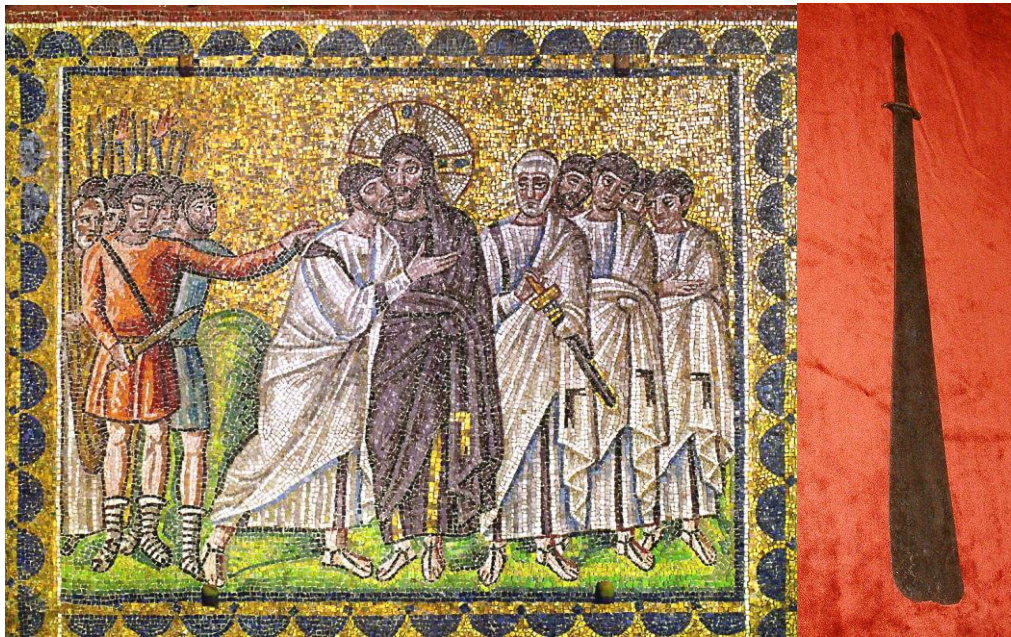
⁷σπειρα, *cohort*=600-1000 men ; **Chiliarch** (Greek: χιλίαρχος), in the Greek army of the Hellenistic period, was a commander of a 1,000 men unit, roughly equivalent to a modern [battalion](#). The office was an adaptation by Alexander the Great of the Persian [Achaemenid](#) empire's *hazarapatish*. A chiliarch held duties both martial and civil. Alexander the Great first awarded this rank to [Hephaestion Amyntoros](#), but after Hephaestion's death it was awarded to [Perdiccas](#). The rank continued in use in later ages: Greek writers wrote of "chiliarchs" when referring to the Roman legionary [tribunes](#), and in the Byzantine army, the title was used as an alternative to that of the [droungarios](#) and the [taxiarches](#).



The Betrayal mosaic at *Nea Moni*, Chios, second half of 11th century; detail, Herod's contingency

Composed of men from Pilate's battalion, Temple guards, and a Herodian contingency, this "band" came parading with "lanterns and torches" (John 18:3), brandishing "swords and staves" (Luke 22:52) to extract one man out of a group of 12. This "asymmetrical response" may have proved embarrassing at the moment, but yielded a surprising response: Simon Peter strikes out,⁸ cutting off the ear of Caiaphas' servant, Malchus (John 18:10).

⁸ For the relic of the Passion known as the "Sword of St. Peter" kept at the Poznań Archdiocesan Museum, see <http://www.poznan.pl/mim/public/trakt/attachments.html?co=show&instance=1017&parent=22068&lang=pl&id=49014>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sword_of_Saint_Peter: "research by scientists from the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw suggests that the weapon could have been made in the 1st century in the eastern borderlands of the Roman Empire"



Ravenna Mosaic of the Betrayal in the Garden; traditional “Sword of St. Peter”⁹

Christ had anticipated this incident (Luke 22:36-38), by referring to Isa 53:12 - “he was numbered with the transgressors” - as being treated like a common thief (Luke 22:52), based on the conduct of his sword-wielding¹⁰ disciples.

An un-designed coincidence between the Gospel accounts is that John gives us details like the servant’s name and relationship to Peter’s interrogator in Caiaphas’ courtyard (John 18:26), while only Luke the physician records Christ healing the ear (Luke 22:51).¹¹ This explains why the kinsman of Malchus does not accost Peter about the ear: the healing had already made it a non-issue.

Even the smallest verbal detail bristles with horrible significance:

“Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and **bound Him**”¹² (Joh 18:12).

As Cyril of Jerusalem keys in on:

⁹ Poznań Archidieceśial Museum. The sword arrived in [Poznań](http://poznan.naszemiasto.pl/wydarzenia/540640.html) in 968 as a gift from John XIII; scientists from the [Polish Army Museum](http://poznan.naszemiasto.pl/wydarzenia/540640.html) in Warsaw suggests that the weapon could have been made in the 1st century in the eastern borderlands of the Roman Empire. 2005-11-25. <http://poznan.naszemiasto.pl/wydarzenia/540640.html>

¹⁰ We know from John 21:15-17 [RSV] and the *Gospel of the Nazoreans* [At Matt 16:17, in the “Zion Gospel Edition” Alfred Schmidtke *Neue Fragmente und Untersuchungen zu den judenchristlichen Evangelien* 1911] that Simon’s real name was *bar Johanan*, or “son of John” and that “Bar Jona” was thus a nickname given to him by Christ In the Talmud, dagger-wielding Zealots were also called the *baryonim* - meaning “boorish” or “wild” —e.g. *Gittin* 56a “Abba Sikra the head of the *baryonim* in Jerusalem was the son of the sister of Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai” Abba Sikra = Father of the *Sicarii*. His real name was Ben Batiah [*Ekah Rab*, I]. *Sicarii* (Latin plural of *Sicarius* ‘dagger-’ or later contract- killer); “When [Albinus](#) reached the city of Jerusalem, he bent every effort and made every provision to ensure peace in the land by exterminating most of the *Sicarii*.” Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* (xx.208) Christ pokes fun at his impulsive and Zealot-like tendencies, as justified by this incident

¹¹ “And Jesus answered and said*, ‘[Suffer ye thus far](#)’ And he --- touched his ear, and healed him” [*Persic and Ethiopic versions add, “to him” [Peter]; the [Arabic version](#) reads, “refrain thyself”; ---- “he went to the wounded man,” as the Persic version inserts]

¹² δεω deo deh'-o a root; TDNT-2:60,148; v AV-bind 37, tie 4, knit 1, be in bonds 1, wind 1; 44 1) to bind tie, fasten 1a) to bind, **fasten with chains**, to throw into chains

They bound Jesus, and brought Him into the hall of the High-priest. And wouldest thou learn and know that **this also is written**? Isaiah says, “Woe unto their soul, for they have taken evil counsel against themselves, saying, “Let us **bind** the Just, for He is troublesome to us”¹³ (Isa 3.9, LXX¹⁴). And, truly 'Woe unto their soul!' Let us see how Isaiah was sawn asunder (Heb 11:37), yet after this the people was restored. Jeremiah was cast into the mire of the cistern, yet was the wound of the Jews healed; for the sin was less, since it was against man. But when the Jews sinned, not against man, but against God in man's nature, Woe unto their soul!—“Let us bind the Just”; could He not then set Himself free, some one will say; He, who freed Lazarus from the bonds of death on the fourth day, and loosed Peter from the iron bands of a prison? Angels stood ready at hand, saying, “Let us burst their bands in sunder” [Ps 2.3]; but they hold back, because their Lord willed to undergo it. [*Catech* 13.12]

Before presenting his case, Caiaphas would engage in some “consensus building” by calling a Sanhedral hearing – by invitation only. According to the Mishnah:

“The Great Sanhedrin consisted of seventy-one [judges], and the Lesser of twenty-three [judges].... [In the case of a] whole tribe, or a false prophet, or a high-priest, if they have to be judged for a crime which may bring capital punishment, a court of seventy-one judges [plus the High Priest] is needed” (m.*Sanh* 1.1).

In spite of this, it is stated specifically by the Huldreich *Toledoth Yeshu*¹⁵ that Jesus was tried only by the *lesser* Sanhedrin. According to the *Georgian Chronicle*,¹⁶ the Jerusalem Sanhedrin requested representatives from the *Diaspora* communities to help adjudicate Jesus' claim to be the “son of God”:

¹³ Also cited in this context by Justin Martyr [*Dial* 136], Ambrose [*Patri* 3:13]; Eusebius [*Demo Evan* 2.3], et al

¹⁴ Compare Wisdom ii. 12: “Let us lie in wait for the righteous; because he is not for our turn (δύσχεριτος, as in Cyril)”

¹⁵ A blasphemous medieval Jewish “Life of Jesus” used as anti-Christian Propaganda; the Huldreich edition was published in Holland in 1702 based on a unique Hebrew MS that Jewish commentators quoted as early as the 8th century; Samuel Krauss [*Das Leben Jesu* Berlin: S. Calvary 1902 pp. 2-5] demonstrated that this “anti-gospel” tradition was in circulation by mid-2nd century; H.J. Schonfield [*According to the Hebrews* Duckworth (London) 1937] believed it to be closely based on the 1st-century *Gospel according to the Hebrews*.

¹⁶ The *Chronicle*, begun in the 500's AD, collated the written records and oral traditions of the region, including the archives of the long-standing Jewish community there. In fact, many of the historical notices itemized in the *Georgian Chronicle* for the first few centuries of the Christian Era are from the perspective of the Jewish community there, as revealed through their correspondence with the Temple Hierarchy in Jerusalem

“emissaries came to the northeast [saying that] the child to whom the Mages had given gifts, having come to full maturity, preached that he was the son of God. ‘Now,’ they said, ‘whoever of our people are wise and learned in our faith, let them come forth and go [to find out about] this matter.’ Having heard this, [Rabbi] Elios [*Elijah*] of Mts'xet'a [and] Lunkinos [*Longinus*] Karsnets'i went. They arrived on the day of the great Friday of the Lord's torment.”¹⁷ (sect. 4; cf. sect. 9)

The Talmud itself records

“On the eve of the Passover Yeshu the Nazorean was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Any one who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.’” (*Sanh* 43a¹⁸)

This is essentially the public admission of what John reports:

“Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where he was, he should shew *it*, that they might take him” (John 11:57).

In other words, Caiaphas hand selected those out of the “greater Sanhedrin” who had already gone along with the indictment of John 11:57, and excluded anyone sympathetic to the Nazorean (e.g. Luke 23:51).

While they would eventually admit to Pilate they have no jurisdiction to adjudicate (John 18:31), they still go through the motions of a highly irregular [non-legal] trial process. The result? Formal charges before Pilate (Luke 23:2) unrelated to the charge of blasphemy for which He was on “trial” (Matt 26:65)!

¹⁷ Compare ch 9 “a letter came from Jerusalem, from the priest Annas to my mother's father Elioz [stating] that the child Jesus who had received gifts from the mages, having grown to manhood, claimed that he was the Son of God. Come, those of you who are able, so that we may implement the laws of Moses regarding him, and kill him. Elioz [Elijah] the priest from the house of Heghi [Heli] , from the clan of Eghiazar [Eliezar], sagacious in the laws, went there. He had a mother from the same line who entreated him, saying: ‘My son, do not partake of the Jews' counsel, for [Jesus is] the [44] message of the prophets, the proverb of the laws, and the word of the living God.’ Along with [Elioz] went Ghunkianos (Longinus) of Karsani”; and the *Life of St.Nino* [Niaphori taught her:] “Now when they nailed the Lord on the cross, and Hasanig [corruptions of the word *patenaki*, i. e. royal officer for executing justice, executioner] struck the nails with an iron hammer in Jerusalem, Eliozi's mother, in Mtzkhet'ha, heard the blows . . . They crucified Him and cast lots for His raiment, and it fell to the lot of a citizen of Mtzkhet'ha, in the North. The Jews buried Christ, and guarded and sealed His tomb”

¹⁸ TB *Sanh* 67 states this “grand-jury” indictment occurred [implicitly, again, by invitation only] in Lydda [near Joppa (Acts 9:38)], based on testimony derived by entrapment.



Early 4th-cent Ivory¹⁹ relief of Jesus being brought before Annas and Caiaphas

But the first order of business was to wear Christ down physically and 'psychologically' before presenting Him to Pilate. (Matt 26:67-68). As noted by the *Bordeaux Pilgrim*, (c AD 333),

“On this side one goes up Sion, and sees where the house of Caiaphas the priest was and there still stands a column against which Christ was beaten with rods [*flagelli*]” (Matt 26:57-68).

This ancient ecclesiastical tradition²⁰ of a prior scourging at Caiaphas' home is confirmed by the *domus Tiberiana* graffiti, which mentions a “secret scourging”²¹ (opposed to the public flagellation Pilate ordered, Mark 15:15).

¹⁹ “...the **Brescia coffer**, which also has the Denial of St Peter, and the Death of Judas. This coffer is acknowledged to be early fourth century work...” [W. R. Lethaby, “EARLY CHRISTIAN ART” in *The Cambridge Medieval History - Volume 1 - Page 604*, 1911]

²⁰ Also, Egeria: “After this, when the dismissal at the Cross has been made, that is, before the sun rises, they all go at once with fervour to Sion, to pray at the column at which the Lord was scourged [*flagellatus*]. And returning thence they sit for awhile in their houses, and presently all are ready. [XXXVII](#) *Itinerarium Egeriae* [4th century]; St. Paula saw in Sion a column supporting the porch of a church, to which the Lord was bound and scourged. [Jerome, *Epist. ad Eustach.*, I, pars. 2] “From Golgotha to St. Syon [are] 200 paces, which is the mother of all churches, which Syon our Lord Christ with the apostles founded. It was the house of St. Mark the evangelist. From St. Syon to the house of Caiaphas, which is now the church of St. Peter, are more or less 50 paces.” *Theod. Tract on the Topography of .Palestine*

²¹ “Furthermore, the inscription states that Jesus was scourged secretly (*in secretis*).” *American Ecclesiastical Review* [1898]- Page 305; see the Appendix for further forensic evidence of a prior scourging on the Shroud of Turin



Column of Flagellation recovered from "House of Caiaphas" in Jerusalem²²

This ritual abuse (Mt 26:67) unwittingly contributed to Caiaphas fulfilling his prophetic role as the High Priest (John 11:51) who must "lay both his hands upon the head" of the sin-offering on behalf of the people (Lev 16:21).

²² "This was anciently kept at Jerusalem with other holy relics on Mount Sion, as mentioned by St. Gregory of Tours, venerable Bede, St. Prudentius, and St. Jerome [see note below]. It remained in the same place till the thirteenth century, when it was brought to Rome by Cardinal John Columna, Apostolic Legate in the East, under Pope Honorius III., anno. 1213. It was placed in a little chapel in the church of St. Praxedes in the oratory of St. Zenon, and is still shown there. It is of jasper marble with white, black and green specks. At the base, it is wider than at its top, and it measures 25 inches of height. The ever increasing veneration of the faithful erected an elegant reliquary of gilded bronze for it in 1898. Its feast is celebrated solemnly on the fourth Lenten Sunday (the former Passion Sunday)"



Traditional scourging site in the “House of Caiaphas”

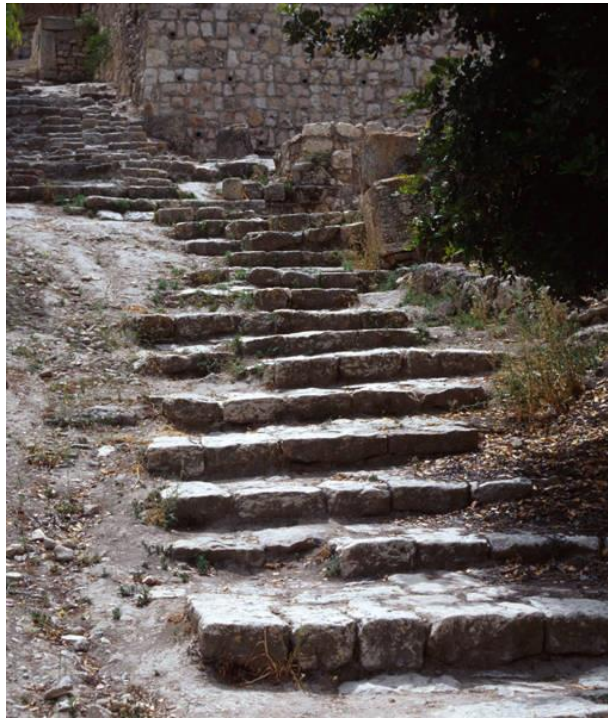
That Christ was fulfilling the typology of the scapegoat, or *Azazel* ritual, was not lost on the Apostles or Church Fathers:

“And the two goats which were ordered to be offered during the fast, of which one was sent away as the scapegoat, and the other sacrificed, were similarly declarative of the two appearances of Christ: the first, in which the elders of your people, and the priests, having **laid hands on Him**²³ and put Him to death, sent Him away as the scapegoat” (Justin Martyr *Dial* 40).

More often than the others, it is Luke who tends to transmit the sense of the staged and theatrical in the narrative. After the scourging, the “Lesser Sanhedrin” would lead him to Pilate’s *praetorium*, “And the whole multitude of them arose, and **led**²⁴ him unto Pilate” (Luke 23:1).

²³ The lament against the “House of Annas” in the Talmud can almost be applied to Christ, line for line: “Woe cometh unto me from the house of Boethus ; woe from their [beating with] staves! Woe's me on account of the house of Annas, woe's me on account of their serpent brood [cp. Matt3:7]; Woe cometh unto me from the house of Kantharos; woe from [illegal decisions from] their pen! Woe cometh unto me from the house of Ishmael ben Phabi; **woe from their** [beatings with] **fists**, for they fill the offices of high priests, and their sons are treasurers, their sons-in-law [=Caiaphas, John 18:13] inspectors, while their servants go about beating us with their rods” (see Tosefta, *Menahot*, XIII, 31; TB *Pesachim*, 57a).

²⁴ As Robertson notes on this verse: “Dramatic historical present of αγω, plural ‘they’ for the Sanhedrists”



First-century steps to Caiaphas' Palace, Jerusalem

The apostle Peter, in his first epistles, gives a remarkably concise yet pregnant Bible study on the famous “Suffering Servant” passage in Isaiah 53 that we will quote throughout this series. We know this was a touchstone passage of the early Church; we know it was a powerful tool in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27-39²⁵). Matthew used Isaiah 53 as a proof-text of Christ’s earthly ministry in Matt 8:17. But it is Peter that gives the most comprehensive application of these verses to Christ, even prophesying the minutia of His transfer from the Sanhedrin to Pilate:

“He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation?” (Isa 53:8)

Peter alludes to this when he says:

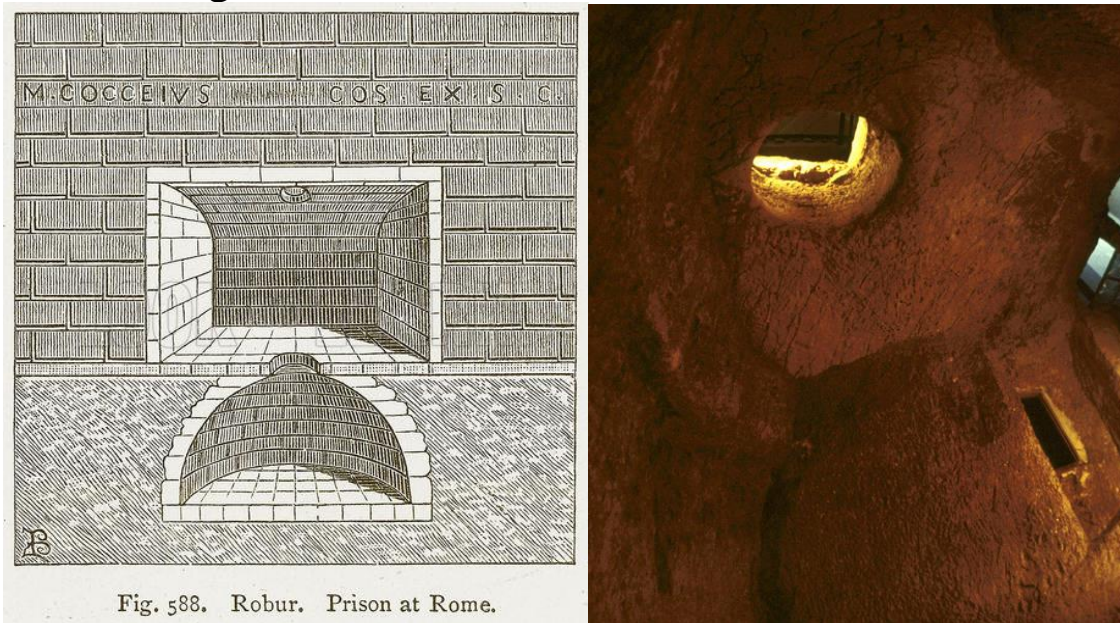
“Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:” (1Pet 2:23²⁶).

²⁵ John Gill noted the continuing convicting and converting power of this passage: “The words are by some rendered, “and we reckoned him the stricken, smitten of God” {מכה אלהים} “percussum Deum”, Gaspar Sanctii *in Isaiam prophetam Commentarii cum paraphrase* 1615, in loc.}, and “humbled”; which version of the words proved the conversion of several Jews in Africa, as Andradius [*fl.* 1500’s] and others relate {*id.* Sanctium *in loc.*}; by which they perceived the passage is to be understood not of a mere man, but of God made man, and of his humiliation and sufferings in human nature” [GILL on Isa 53:4]

²⁶ The parallelism is more explicit in the Vulgate; the Vulgate, one copy of the Itala, St. Cyprian, and Fulgentius, read, *Tradebat autem iudicanti se injuste*; “He delivered himself to him who judged unrighteously;” meaning Pontius Pilate

That is, He continued to submit Himself²⁷ to worldly authorities, even as He was transferred from the Sanhedrin to Pilate, to Herod, and back again to Pilate.

The reference to “Prison” in Isaiah is affirmed in the ancient Church tradition connecting the robur-type prison pit within the “House of Caiaphas” (similar to the *Mamertine* prison cells of Rome) with Christ’s incarceration during the deliberations of the Sanhedrin.



Robut-type [Pit-Prison](#), inside [Palace](#) of [Caiaphas](#) [R]

Christ would have been left at the southern steps of the *praetorium*. These were the same steps from which Paul addressed the Temple mob (Acts 21:35,40), now known as *La Scala Santa*.²⁸ Christ would then have been escorted by Pilate’s guards **inside**, while Caiaphas and his entourage would have proceeded **outside** to the western gallery of the *praetorium*.

²⁷ “Imperfect active again (kept on committing himself) of παραδιδωμι, to hand over, usually of one to a judge....Jesus thus handed himself and his cause over to the Father who judges righteously (τω κρινοντι δικαιως, dative of present active articular participle of κρινω).”[Robertson’s]; “In this Peter seems to have before his mind Isa 53:8. Compare Ro 12:19, on our corresponding duty. Leave your case in His hands, not desiring to make Him executioner of your revenge, but rather praying for enemies” [JFB’s]

²⁸ See *Memorie storiche della Scala santa* Leonardo Mazzucconi Tipografia Ferretti, 1840; *Compendio istorico . . . concernenti la scala santa* Giuseppe Maria Soresini, Giuseppe Pazzaglia 1674. Traditionally ascended on one’s knees, with a prayer at each step [e.g., *A Devout way of ascending the Scala Santa* Propaganda-Press, 1857]

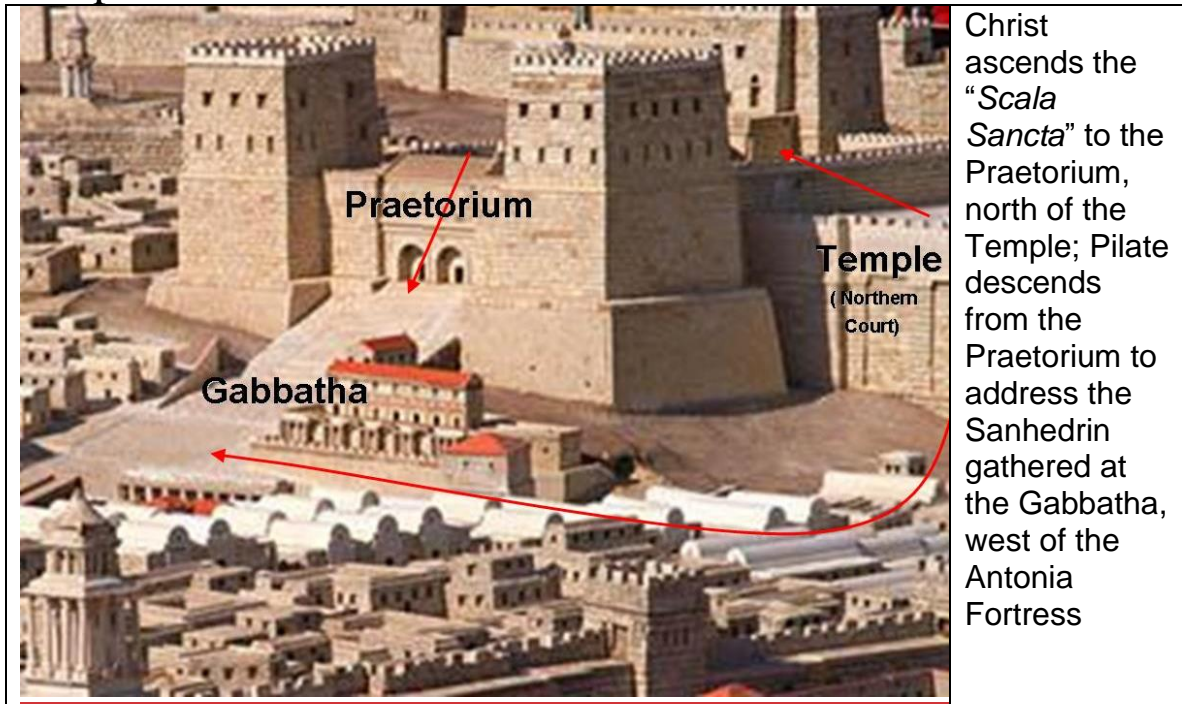


Jesus' initial evidentiary hearing before Pilate affords an extreme example of the physical separation of accuser and accused²⁹ that was the norm in a Roman setting: ". . . and they themselves went not **into** the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the Passover" [John 18:28]. Because Pilate was sensitive [even superstitious] regarding their religious concerns, he condescended to meet them on "neutral ground" so that they could avoid ritual impurity: Pilate then **went out** unto them, and said, "What accusation bring ye against this man?" John 18:29.³⁰ This

²⁹ There are significant parallels between this and the case of Paul in Acts 23, and should be visualized as such; as Ramsay points out: "We must imagine the scene. Paul is set before the Jewish leaders; i.e. over against them. He is not in their midst . . . Paul is on one side, the Jews on the other, and the officer between." [William Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915) p.93]

³⁰ Again, Robertson notes the emphasis of the gesture: "(exhlyen exw). Note both ex and exw (went out - outside), since the Sanhedrin would not come into Pilate's palace. Apparently on a gallery over the pavement in front of the palace (John 19:13)."

“neutral ground” was the “Gabbatha”³¹ ([John 19:13](#)), related to the Temple mount complex itself.



When Pilate exited the Praetorium and went outside to the “Gabbatha” gallery, the stage was set.³²

³¹ = *Lithostroton* on Greek; in Aramaicized Hebrew, *Gab Baitha*, i.e., “the ridge of the house” = “the temple-mound,” on a part of which the fortress of Antonia was built. This “temple-mound” was covered with a tessellated “pavement” (Gr. *lithostroton*, i.e., “stone-paved”) [EASTON’S]; cf “I remember that R. Gamaliel [see Acts 5:34,22:3], your grandfather, was standing on a high eminence [lit. “*upper Gab*”] on the Temple Mount, when the *Book of Job* in a Targumic version was brought before him, whereupon he said to the builder, ‘Bury it under the course [of stones].’” [TB *Shabbat* 115a]

³² The Gabbatha would have been enhanced by an acoustic-shell construction to reinforce the audibility of the testimony and verdict, and heighten the dramatic effect, as depicted in the *Rossano Codex* and certain 4th century Christian sarcophagi.



Folio 8v from the Rossano Gospels, Christ before Pilate

From the viewing area below, Pilate would be seen making a number of dramatic entrances, exits, and introductions. In fact, he would have departed through an actual curtain, dividing the private judging area (the *Praetorium*) and the public sentencing area (the *Gabbatha*)). This was customary in Roman Jurisprudence and is mentioned by later documents specifically in the context of Christ's trial.³³ Pilate would use this aspect to great effect a number of times throughout the trial. We can imagine Pilate,

³³ See *Apost Const* 2.6[52], "for several days they make inquiry about [the accused] with a full council, and [also] with the veil interposed"; Chrys Hom V on 2Tim "Even robbers, whilst they are in prison, live without fear, but when they are brought to the very curtain of the court, παραπέτασμα. they sink with terror" – et al. "Then Pilate ordered the curtain of the tribunal where he was sitting to be drawn, and says to Jesus: 'Thy nation has charged thee with being a king'." So the apocryphal *Acta Pilati*, recorded in the 4th century "Gospel of Nicodemus" 1:19

almost more a “master of ceremonies” than judge, drawing the curtain back.



Ravenna Mosaic of Roman empress Theodora under acoustic shell and the interposing veil between court and gallery [note the bowl and fountain for ceremonial washings]

Christ was already badly beaten by the time Caiaphas brought him before Pilate, a prejudicial circumstance that Pilate weighs negatively in his initial assessment. We see that, from the start, Pilate is suspicious of being manipulated and remains on guard through out.

“They answered and said unto him, ‘If he were not a **malefactor**,³⁴ we would not have delivered him up unto thee’” (John 18:30).

Pilate moves for immediate dismissal:

“Then said Pilate unto them, ‘Take ye him, and judge him according to your law’. The Jews therefore said unto him, ‘It is not lawful for us to put any man to death’” (John 18:31).

The elder Annas and Caiaphas would stand as the prosecution, left (*sinistre*) of Jesus, as in the *Rossano Codex* depiction.³⁵ Pilate’s official court attendants would be present as witnesses of the proceedings. While civil officials or military judges were ones not necessarily trained in the

³⁴ Here the periphrastic present participle ποίων with κακόν emphasizes the idea that Jesus was a habitual evil-doer, with the connotation of a *capital*-offense; cp Lu 23:32 “And there were also two other, malefactors κακούργων, led with him **to be put to death**” & 1Pe 2:14 “Or **unto governors**, as unto them that are sent by him **for the punishment of evildoers** κακοποιοῦν ”

³⁵ According to Justin Martyr, they bring a written accusation, listing the misdeeds [*Apol.* I. 35], to which Tertullian probably alludes when he says “*magistri primoresque Judaeorum exasperabantur*” etc. [*Apol* 21]. This detail probably comes from Pilate’s report itself; the very same word ἀντιλεγειν is used in Justin and in the 4th century *Acta Pilati* [Gk A ch. 9, compare Lat. ch. I]

law, they could avail themselves of legal talent by appointing *assessores*, their legal council in court.



Rosanno Miniature

We find their function prophetically foreshadowed in Psalm 2:2 –
 “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers **take counsel** together,³⁶ against the LORD, and against his anointed.”

For the preliminary hearing, Pilate would have a scroll in hand, representing his imperial mandate to adjudicate such cases.³⁷ Pilate would be seated on a chair representing imperial jurisdiction, behind a desk³⁸ with the implements ready for writing a sentence [to add to the air of intimidation], and spread with a white cloth. The cloth was embroidered with the portraits of the reigning emperor and empress (*sacri vultus*), and

³⁶ Compare Ps 31:13 “For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side: while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life.” In the Rosanno miniature, Pilate is shown with such a council, a group of five men, who fit the precise description by John Lydus: “...men unmoved and exhibiting a proper severity in the law, to whom had fallen every power of office. These conducted the legal examinations in the courtroom...” *De Magistratibus* III, 16) (I. Bekker's edition, Bonn, 1837, 210) Ἰωάννης Λαυρέντιος ὁ Λυδός, 6th century Byzantine administrator and writer on antiquarian subjects. The chief value of his books consists in the fact that the author made use of the works (now lost) of old Roman writers on similar subjects. Cf. *Cod. Just.* i, 51, i (July 14, 286). The *Codex Theod.* 6, 15, I (March 18, 413), raised those counts of the first order to the rank of *vicarii* who act as *assessores*, either in the provinces or at the sacred imperial court.

³⁷ LOERKE: “One might argue that the imperial standards and portraits were a sufficient bond of the validity of the judge, yet an imperial edict of 383 warns that “no one is to be intimidated by the official position of any man, even though he displays the power of a tribune, or a *notarius*, or a count, but Our sacred letters must be demanded.” *Cod. Theod.* I, 3, i. As symbols, *codicilli* enjoyed that aura of sanctity which had surrounded the Emperor's person and acts since ideas of divine kingship had penetrated Rome. This *Divina Electio* stood behind the scroll of Pilate in these miniatures of the trial, conferring a sacrosanct character on the authority he exercised. “For it is a case of sacrilege to doubt if he is worthy, whom the Emperor shall have chosen.” *Cod. Just.*, IX, 29, 2, A.D. 384.”

³⁸ LOERKE: “Like the scroll, the table too has a legal as well as an administrative meaning. It is in fact the table which symbolizes Pilate's competence to hear this civil trial in which the plaintiff was the high priest, acting on behalf of the Sanhedrin, and the defendant was Jesus of Nazareth. In the Palestine of the Theodosian Code and the *Notitia Dignitatum*, a trial which involved no military personnel would have been heard by the *consularis* and not by the *dux*. *Cod. Theod.* II, I, 2, and 9, dated A.D. 355 and 397; and *Cod. Just.* I, 46, 2, of A.D. 416. The table showed that Pilate embraced the powers of *consularis* and could therefore competently preside at this trial. This issue of proper jurisdiction was a basic one in Roman law. An edict of September 22, 379, republished in the codes of both Theodosius and Justinian, declared: “In litigations of private citizens, the following rule shall be observed, that a decision rendered by a judge *not theirs* shall bind none of the litigants” *Cod. Theod.* IV, 16, 2; *Cod. Just.* viI, 48, 4 The table made Pilate's decision binding.”

behind the chair stand two *iconophors* carrying standards, also bearing these images.³⁹

Caiaphas, sensing Pilate's skepticism, and even eagerness to dismiss, responds quickly - by changing the charges against Jesus *ad hoc*!

▣ **Luke 23:2** - And they began to accuse him, saying, "**We have found this man,**" they said,

(1), **"an agitator among our nation,** [contrast John 6:15],

(2) **forbidding the payment of tribute to Caesar** [contrast Luke 20:25], and

(3), **claiming to be himself an anointed king.**" (contrast Luke 9:20-21)⁴⁰

It is at this point that Pilate withdraws behind the veil, leaving the *Gabbatha* for a "closed door" interview with Christ:

"Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, 'Art thou the King of the Jews?'" [John 18:33⁴¹]

The result? Failure to indict:

"And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, '**I find in him no fault**.'" (John 18:37)

Jesus' legal "strategy" - to neither confirm nor deny – is essentially entering a plea of "no contest" throughout the trial. There is much theological import to this legal decision on His part. By not employing any defense strategy, Christ waits on God alone for his justification (Rom 8:33). As He told His disciples, He awaits God the Holy Spirit to convict *the world* of *their* injustice (John 16:8-11). He cannot plead "guilty" to **claiming** to be Christ and King – He does **NOT** claim, but actually **IS**; neither can He deny it by pleading "innocent." As a result, it will be

³⁹ LOERKE: What Pilate in fact has in these miniatures is not a standard with imperial portraits, but rather an imperial standard whose shape alone marked it the personal banner of the Emperor. The standards in these miniatures, made up of a square blue field set high on a golden staff, are in the form of the ancient Roman *vexillum*, which had become the personal standard of the Emperor **even before** Constantine had transformed it into the *labarum* by the addition of the *Chi Rho*. That there are two standards instead of one is also unusual and may reflect a symmetrical arrangement actually used in courtrooms. Cf. description of the Last Judgment in *Opus Imperfectum in Mattheum*, 54 on Matt. 25:31: "The judge will hear criminal persons in public, his tribunal he sets in heaven, about it he establishes the royal insignia (*circum se constituit vexilla regalia*)."
P.G., 56, 94f. For another suggestion see Kruse, op.cit., pp. 9gf. In the *ad locutio* relief on the Arch of Constantine, the emperor is flanked by *labara*.

⁴⁰ Several copies of the *Itala* add, "Destroying our law and prophets" *Et solventem legem nostram et propheta*; while of little interest to Pilate, this accusation is affirmed in the Talmud "that thou mayest not have a son, or a disciple, that corrupts his food publicly [i.e. his doctrine, who departs from the true doctrine and worship, to heresy and idolatry, and propagates the same], *yruwnh wvy Nwjk*, "*as Jesus the Nazarene*." [TB *Sanhedrin* 103. 1 & *Beracot* 17. 2]

⁴¹ The Turfan "Great Crucifixion Hymn" M-132 [perhaps dependent on transcriptions from the original *Acta Pilati*?] words the question even more Hebraically, as if Pilate was reading from a written indictment handed to him by the Sanhedrin: "Are you truly 'a king in the House of Jacob, and in the race of Jacob'?" [cp. John 18:35] Jesus then points out the derivative [i.e., hear-say] nature of his question, John 18:34.

Rome's imperial representative that will declare Him legally "king" by the trial's end.

The prophetic significance is equally important. Peter points out: "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not" (1Pet 2:23), alluding to Isa 53:7

"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, **yet he opened not his mouth**; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so **he openeth not his mouth**"

He kept silent (as a sacrificial "lamb", as John the Baptist foresaw [John 1:29,36]) – not only to convict the Jews familiar with Temple sacrifice, but even the Gentiles who knew a reluctant or adversarial animal was unfit for sacrifice.⁴²

Caiaphas then "raises the ante" –

"And they were the **more** fierce, saying, 'He stirreth up [ἀνασείει ~foments sedition] the people, teaching throughout all Jewry,⁴³ beginning from Galilee to this place'" (Luke 23:5).

Pilate's hands were seemingly forced with this new charge of sedition – a capital offense. In fact, the charges were identical to the Zealot platform, for which Barabbas and his compatriots were already condemned!⁴⁴

Mark informs us (15:7) that Barabbas worked directly with the two criminals who would eventually be crucified with Jesus. They were eyewitnesses of, and participants in, the insurrection instigated by Barabbas. In Luke 23:41, one of them⁴⁵ confesses that "we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss." How could he

⁴² See Macrobius' *Saturnalia*. 3.5, Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 8.45, et al

⁴³ *Codex Colbertinus*, a copy of the ancient *Itala* version, this verse stands thus: "He stirreth up the people, beginning from Galilee, and teaching through all Judea unto this place; *our wives and our children he hath rendered averse from us, and he is not baptized as we are.*"

⁴⁴ The three previous charges, while false, were not mere fabrications. Point for point, they were the "platform" of Barabbas' campaign against Roman occupation. That is how the penitent thief (as Barabbas' co-conspirator) could be so sure of Jesus' innocence. That the charges against Jesus were switched at the last possible moment is again confirmed by the gospel accounts. The original charge brought against Jesus by the Temple authorities was blasphemy; [See Matt 26:65, Mark 14:64] by the time he is presented to Pilate, however, the charge is sedition. [Compare John 18:31 (where Pilate assumes the charges to be theological in nature) and Luke 23:2]. It is only after Jesus has been condemned that the Temple authorities confess to Pilate that the original charges were religious and not political in nature (John 19:6-7).

⁴⁵ In the apocryphal *Acta Pilati* tradition, the "Good Thief" is known as Demas or Dysmas; in Bar Hebraeus' commentary on *Matthew*, he is called *Titus*, citing "the book of the holy Hierotheus, the disciple of the great Paul"; the Relic of the Good Thief's *patibulum* is kept in the *Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme*, in Rome

have known of Christ's innocence? Because he knew that the charges against Barabbas were transferred to Jesus, who had no involvement with them.

His suspicions were confirmed; Pilate closed the preliminary hearings with a sophisticated legal maneuver he believed would absolve him of further involvement: a political tradition of Graeco-Roman times, the *lautia*:

“And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's **jurisdiction**, he sent him to Herod [Antipas], who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time.” (Luke 23:7)

Tertullian, the 2nd-century Roman jurist,⁴⁶ recognized this, and even attributed prophetic significance to it:

At that time “the heathen raged, and the people imagined vain things; the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers gathered themselves together against the Lord and against His Christ.’ [Ps. 2:1-2] The *heathen* were Pilate and the Romans; the *people* were the tribes of Israel; the *kings* were represented in Herod, and the *rulers* in the chief priests.⁴⁷ When, indeed, He was sent to Herod “gratuitously” [*velut munus*⁴⁸] by Pilate, the words of Hosea were accomplished, for he had prophesied of Christ: “And they shall carry Him bound as a **present** to the king.” (Hos 10:6 LXX)⁴⁹

Luke refers to Pilate “sending up” [ἀνεπεμψεν, 23:7] Jesus to Herod, using the Roman legal term for referring a prisoner to another's jurisdiction (as in Acts 25:21).

⁴⁶ Many scholars (most recently J. Quasten *Patrology*, Vol II, Utrecht: Spectrum 1950-1986) have identified Tertullian with the famous jurist whose legal opinions are oft quoted in Justinian's *Digest*

⁴⁷ This identification had already been made in *Acts* 4: 24-3 but became more explicit and returned to the psalter in Greek [Origen, *P.G.*, 12, O1101 B; Athanasius, *P.G.*, 27, 64 D; Theodoretus of Cyrene, *P.G.* 80, 873 C.] and Latin [Rufinus, in J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursu completus, Series latina*, 2I, 650 (hereafter *P.L.*);

Cassiodorus, *P.L.*, 70, 36] commentaries on the Psalms. **Irenaeus** *Demo Apost Preach.* 74 “And again David (says) thus concerning the sufferings of Christ: *Why did the Gentiles rage, and the people imagine vain things? Kings rose up on the earth, and princes were gathered together, against the Lord and his Anointed.*” [Ps. 2.1f]

⁴⁸ According to scholars of Tertullian, this *velut munus* was, by definition, the *lautia* [referred to as *xenium* in the passage from Hosea]. This Roman *lautia*, defined as “a state **entertainment** to distinguished foreigners in the city” See Acts 25:22-26 for another example.

⁴⁹ See also Justin Martyr *Dial* ciii. “And when Herod succeeded Archelaus, having received the authority which had been allotted to him, Pilate sent to him by way of compliment Jesus bound; and God foreknowing that this would happen, had thus spoken: ‘And they brought Him to the Assyrian, a present to the king.’ [Hos 10:6]”; **Irenaeus** *Demo Apost* 77. “Again He says in the Twelve Prophets: *And they bound him and brought him as a present to the king.* [Hos 10:6] For Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, and he had at that time resentful enmity against Herod the king of the Jews. But then, when Christ was brought to him bound, Pilate sent Him to Herod, giving command to enquire of him, that he might know of a certainty what he should desire concerning Him; making Christ a convenient occasion of reconciliation with the king”

The gesture was both a diversion for the honored guest, an acknowledgment of his authority, and shrewd jurisprudence: either Herod sentenced him and took responsibility, or exonerated him and corroborated Pilate's assessment before the crowd. Sometime before Pilate recalls the "prosecution," Herod made a behind-the-scenes deal with the Temple hierarchy. According to Lactantius:

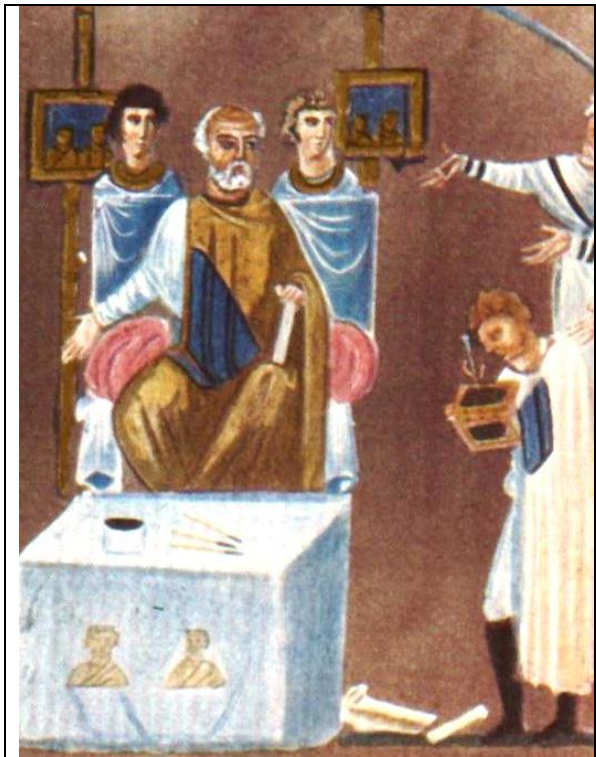
"Pontius was overpowered both by their outcries, **and** by the instigation of Herod the tetrarch, who feared, lest he should be deposed from his sovereignty" (*Div. Inst.* 4.18)

The apostles confirm Herod was no bystander in this process. Peter's public prayer to God announced to listeners:

"For of a truth, **both Herod, and Pontius Pilate**, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom you made Messiah, but only to do whatsoever Your hand and Your counsel had already determined beforehand." (Acts 4:27-28)⁵⁰

The maneuver failed, as Herod remanded Christ back to the custody of the Sanhedrin, and their case back to Pilate. In terms of the trial, the ball was back in Pilate's court, and the show went on. Pilate readied the tribunal for the final hearing. At this point, official reporters would be brought in to record closing arguments, verdict, and final sentence, all in full view of the spectators.

⁵⁰ See also *Gospel of Peter* 1, Ignatius of Ant Smyrna 1.2 *ad Magnesia* xi, *Acts of Peter* 8: "Thou didst harden the heart of Herod . . . ; thou didst give boldness unto Caiaphas, that he should deliver our Lord Jesus Christ unto the unrighteous multitude." Justin Martyr writing to emperor Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138-161), assured him that "[David] foretold the conspiracy which was formed against Christ by Herod the king of the Jews, and the Jews themselves, and Pilate, who was your governor among them, with his soldiers" (1 *Apol* 40). Melito *Peri Pascha* 93, Iren *Demo Apost* 74. "And again David (says) thus concerning the sufferings of Christ: *Why did the Gentiles rage, and the people imagine vain things? Kings rose up on the earth, and princes were gathered together, against the Lord and his Anointed.* [Ps. ii. 1 f] For Herod the king of the Jews and Pontius Pilate, the governor of Claudius Caesar came together and condemned Him to be crucified. For Herod feared, as though He were to be an earthly king, lest he should be expelled by Him from the kingdom. But Pilate was constrained by Herod and the Jews that were with him against his will to deliver Him to death: (for they threatened him) if he should not rather do this than act contrary to Caesar, by letting go a man who was called a king" The 3rd-century Syriac *Didascalia Apostolorum* states flatly "**Herod commanded** that he should be crucified, and our Saviour suffered for us on Friday" Lact *Div Inst* 4.18: "Then Pontius was overpowered both by their outcries, and by the instigation of Herod the tetrarch, who feared lest he should be deposed from his sovereignty" *Apostolic Constitutions* 6.6 "Jesus Christ of Nazareth; who was crucified under Pontius Pilate **and Herod**, and died, and rose again from the dead"



As depicted in the Rossano Codex, the 5th-cent *ciborium* of San Marco, et al; LOERKE: “the first scene of the cycle of monumental paintings depicting the martyrdom of St. Euphemia, described by Asterius of Amasea (*Homily on Euphemia*, P.G., 40, 336): “. . . those who took the minutes have **wax tablets and styluses**; one of them drops his hand from the wax tablet, looks abruptly at the defendant completely turning his face, as if commanding her to speak more loudly that, straining to hear, he might not write punishable errors.”⁵¹ One court stenographer became a martyr by throwing his pen and notebook on the ground (Martyrdom of Marcellus and Cassian in *A Treasury of Early Christianity*, ed. A. Freemantle, New York, 1953, p. 202).”

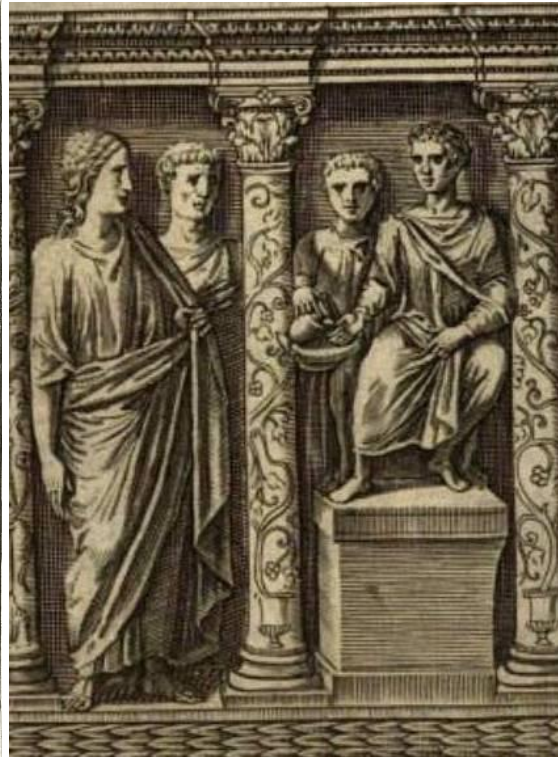
The ink and pens on the table in the *Rossano* miniatures of the trial show that one further requirement of Roman legal procedure was being met here.⁵² Pen and ink certify that Pilate's decision would appear in proper written form.

We can catch sight of this legal point in Luke's account of the trial. According to this evangelist, Pilate **said** (εἶπεν) three times (23: 4, 14-16, and 22) that he found no fault in this man, but at the end, when “the voices . . . prevailed, Pilate gave sentence (επέκρινεν – **written** decree) that it should be as they required (v. 24).”

Pilate would first, with great ceremony bring out the portable “tribunal” [του βηματον, the “bema”] (John 19:13), just as Julius Caesar carried a tribunal with him in expeditions (Josephus *Ant* 20.9.1).

⁵¹ The genuineness of this homily is sustained by Eiliv Skard, "Asterios von Amasea und Asterios der Sophist," *Symbolae Osloensis*, XX, 1940, p. 88

⁵² Roman judges were required to read their decisions from written statements. For "if a judicial decision should be spoken when it had not been written, it shall not be fit to have the name of a decision." [*Cod. Theod.* IV, 17, 1 of AD 374].



Trajan's portable tribunal, flanked by imperial iconophors, adjudicating the surrender of the Parthians {L},; Pilate seated atop *bema* [from the ancient⁵³ "Lateran Sarcophagus"] {R}.

The prosecution stood their ground on the *Gabbatha* as Pilate's officials filed in and assumed their positions in the gallery above. Last of all, Pilate himself would come out to introduce the accused and accusers to the mob of spectators. Pilate would do his best to orchestrate the drama for the crowds in order to elicit the desired outcry for mercy.⁵⁴ He specifically gathers them for an *acclamatio populi*⁵⁵: "So when they were now assembled, Pilate appealed to them," (Matt 27:17 Weymouth's). He truly believed he could win the crowd over to his side by presenting them with an obviously absurd option: "Whom will ye that I release unto you? - Jesus⁵⁶ Barabbas? - Or Jesus, who is called Messiah?"

⁵³ De Rossi remarks that the grace and refinement of the faces of our Lord and the Apostles would incline us to ascribe this work to the age of Septimius Severus [r. 193 to 211]; Friedrich Sickler, *Almanach aus Rom*. Vol 1, 1810, pp. 173-174, actually assigns to it that date.

⁵⁴ Most relevant to the trial process, such a practice, assuming that it could be properly controlled, had several advantages for the state as well as for the people. As Ramsay MacMullen has said, "It is in the nature of aloof and authoritarian governments to communicate with their subjects from some royal box or palace balcony . . . and to respond not only to mass acclaim but to mass abuse" [*Enemies of the Roman order: treason, unrest, and alienation in the empire* - 1992, Page 178]. Pilate's use of it here would have been considered "acceptable," and was eventually codified.

⁵⁵ The tradition of *Acclamatio Populi* was ancient, accepted, and varied - from the obsequious & tiresome shouts of senators in support of an imperial edict, to the approval given an *imperator* by his troops, [In the later Empire, such "by popular acclamation" rulings became more stereotyped and formal. Otto Treitinger, *Die ostromische Kaiser und Reichsidee nach ihrer Gestaltung im hbfischen Zeremoniell* [Jena, 1938], p. 72; see also P. Petit, *Libanius et la vie municipale*, pp. 224-25. See, for example, the minutes of the Senate appended to the Latin text of the *Codex Theodosianus* [AD 438] The *Codex Theodosianus* preserves several statutes which suggest that the emperor listened with interest to the vociferous shouts of the urban crowd, whether they praised good provincial governors or condemned official imperial policy. In 331, Constantine guaranteed: "We shall carefully investigate whether such utterances are truthful and are not poured forth effusively and wantonly by clients [*clientelae*]. The praetorian prefect and the counts who are stationed throughout the provinces shall refer to Our Wisdom the utterances of Our provincials." [Cod. Theod. 1.16, 6 (November 1, 331, Constantinople), translation Pharr.]] The Roman circus had long been recognized as a place where the inhabitants of Rome could petition the emperor and otherwise freely express their sentiments.

⁵⁶ So named in Origen, Isho'dad of Merv on Matt, *Book of the Bee* bh. 44, the Old Syriac, and later Greek MSS; BarRabbah[n] - Munst, duT, GNaz, ActPil, syH

Pilate's legal maneuver was dependent on the custom of *privilegium paschale*:

“Now at *that* feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would” (Matt 27: 15) “But ye have a custom,⁵⁷ that I should release unto you one at the Passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?” (John 18:39)

The Apostolic preaching affirmed a strong Gentile presence at the condemnation of Christ (see Acts 4:27, Acts 7:45, etc), and this was a crowd especially attuned to Roman circus-style justice, and especially susceptible to mob mentality. It was this element that Pilate hoped to manipulate.

We can envision the visual extremes presented on either end of the gallery, emerging in sequence from behind the judicial curtain. The pathos-inspiring contrast was meant to override Roman judicial demands by an *acclamatio populi*, but the Temple authorities had managed to turn this process on its head:

“But the chief priests moved [ἀνεσείσαν] the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them” (Mark 15:11)

By hook or by crook, the Temple hierarchy had managed to whip the crowds into a frenzy (like an earthquake, σεισμόν) to acclaim Barabbas instead of Christ, AND demand Christ crucifixion. What interest in Barabbas could the Temple authorities have that would motivate this elaborate “bait and switch”? Zealots originally served in a semi-official capacity at the Temple since Maccabean times.⁵⁸ The discharge of this

⁵⁷ There were ancient customs in both the Graeco-Roman and Semitic cultures [See C. G. Chavel "The Releasing of a Prisoner on the Eve of Passover in Ancient Jerusalem" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 60 (1941): 273-278 and J. Blinzler *The Trial of Jesus* (Westminster MD: Newman 1959): 218-221] that allowed for a common law pardon of execution, - an act of clemency, especially during festive occasions and public spectacle such as this. The Jews during the Herodian era maintained a version of this practice and connected it specifically with Passover, as shown by the Mishnah's reference to a Passover sacrifice for "one whom they promised to release from prison" (*Pesachim* 8:6). Chrysostom referred to it as "their custom from old time" (*Hom 84 on John* 19:39-40). Obviously, there was no conflict between what Roman custom allowed and what Pilate chose to do during his prefecture in Judaea. We can compare his actions to those of the Roman governor of Egypt who, in 85 AD, documented his release of a prisoner at the behest of the populace, preserved in *Papyrus Florentinus* 61[. Deissmann *Light from the Ancient East* [London, 1910]: p.269.]

⁵⁸ *Jewish Encyclopedia*: "Sanh. ix. 11....contains a statute, evidently of the Maccabean time, declaring that "Whosoever steals the libation cup [Num. iv. 7] or curses one with the aid of the Holy Name [Lev. xxiv. 16, Sifra] or has sexual intercourse with a Syrian [heathen] woman shall be felled by the *Qanna'im* or Zealots."" ["Zealots"]; Compare *Ant* 15.11.5: this was encompassed by a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription, which forbade any foreigner to go in under pain of death. *Wars* 5.5.2: When you go through these [first] cloisters, unto the second [court of the] temple, there was a partition made of stone all round, whose height was three cubits: its construction was very elegant; upon it stood pillars, at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek, and some in Roman letters, that "no foreigner should go within the holy precinct"; That the Romans accepted this on religious grounds is proven by the remarkable transcript of Titus' speech preserved by Josephus: "Have not you, vile wretches that you are, by our permission, put up this partition-wall before your sanctuary? Have not you been allowed to put up the pillars thereto belonging, at due distances, and on it to engrave in Greek, and in your own letters, this prohibition, that no foreigner should go beyond that wall. Have not we given you leave to kill such as go beyond it, though he were a Roman?" (*Wars* 6.2.4) Any question regarding the authenticity of this practice was laid to

duty can be seen in the case of Paul who was almost killed on the spot for allegedly bringing a Gentile into the Temple precincts (Acts 21:27-32). And who was responsible for the enforcement of such a regulation? The Zealot-priests.⁵⁹

Pilate initially refuses to yield to this *acclamatio populi*, and offers what he believes would be an acceptable compromise sentence:

And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, said unto them, “Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, **have found no fault** in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him, no, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. I will therefore chastise⁶⁰ him, and release him. (Luke 23:13-16)

With heightening irony, Pilate (acting essentially in his role as pagan priest⁶¹) declares again that Christ is legally and ceremonially “without fault” – i.e. suitable as an expiatory sacrifice.⁶² Pilate knew, as well as the Hebrews, the importance of a faultless sacrificial offering: “Your lamb shall be **without blemish**, a male” (Ex 12:5). Similarly, a priest had to be declared “without blemish” (Lev 21:21) before they could serve as such, even as Christ was to serve as our High Priest (Heb 9:11). Pilate went on to fulfill another prophecy:

“Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a **purple robe**, and said, ‘**Hail, King of the Jews!**’ and they smote him with their hands” (John 19:1-3).

rest with the discovery of two examples of this very inscription, the first in 1871 by Clermont-Ganneau and the second in 1935 by J. H. Iliffe, which was found to read: “No foreigner is to enter within the balustrade and embankment around the Temple. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his death which follows” [Iliffe, J. H. “The QANATOS Inscription from Herod’s Temple, Fragment of a Second Copy.” *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine* 6 (1938): 1-3; Frey, Jean Baptiste. *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum*. Vol. 2. Rome: Pontificio Instituto di Archeologia Christiana, 1936-52.]

⁵⁹ See E. Schurer *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* v. 2 (Leipzig 1890): 3,274

⁶⁰ *Paideusav*: “of a judge, ordering one to be scourged”

⁶¹ A hierarch of the cult of emperor worship [compare God’s usage of the pagan prophet Balaam, Num 23:4ff]. F. A. Banks conjectured, more specifically, personal soothsayer to Emperor Tiberius [*Coins of Bible Days* (New York: Sanford J. Durst 1955); re-iterated by D. Hendin *Guide to Biblical Coins* (New York: Amphora 1996); affirmed by J-P Fontanille & S.L. Gosline *The Coins of Pontius Pilate* (Warren Center PA: Shangri-La 2001)]

⁶² It is the same language of the heavenly court in John’s *Revelation* that declares of the redeemed, “in their mouth was found no guile: for they are **without fault** before the throne of God” [Rev14:5], also alluding to the prophecy of Isaiah 53



Depiction of the Robe of scorning in the *Rabbula Gospel Codex*,⁶³ from AD 586, when the Robe was still preserved on display at Constantinople. Shelomon of Basrah wrote in his *Book of the Bee* that the purple robe put upon our Lord is said to have been a present to the **Maccabees** 'from the emperors of the Greeks'. (cf. Bar Salibi, who may have derived it from St Ephraim (Lamy i,589)). Matthew 27:28 calls it a "scarlet robe," (χλαμυδα κοκκινην), kind of short cloak worn by soldiers, military officers, magistrates, kings, emperors (2Macc 12:35; Josephus, *Ant.* V 1,10), The scarlet colour (κοκκινην) was a dye usually derived from the female insect (κερμεις) which gathered on the *ulex chochyleus* found in Palestine. These dried clusters of insects look like berries and form the famous dye. The word occurs in Plutarch, Epictetus, Herodas, and late papyri besides the Septuagint and New Testament. Mark 15:17 and John also have "purple" (πορφυραν). The "purple" was usually derived from shell-fish. The ancients gave the name "purple" to any color that had a mixture of red in it, and consequently these different colors might be sometimes called by the same name. Archbishop Anthony of Novgorod, who visited the Basilica *Santa Sophia* at Constantinople in A.D. 1200, describes the vast riches and stores of relics there, including **the purple robe of scorn** brought there by St. Helena (see his *Liber qui dicitur Peregrinus in Itinéraires russes en Orient* (*Soc. Orient Latin, serie geogr.*, vol. v)). His account might seem exaggeration were it not for the testimony of the Crusaders/Sackers of AD 1204 and the actual spoils which they took back into the West. Nicetas describes the destruction of the altar, *ciborium*, and iconostasis. He mentions no less than forty golden censers, silver candelabra, and other vessels (Lethaby and Swainson, *Church of Sancta Sophia in Constantinople*, pp. 74 ff). For Robert de Clary's account in the thirteenth century, see his *Prise de Constantinople* in C. Hopf's *Chroniques greco-romanes*, p. 67

The soldiers' actions were a mockery customarily associated with religious festivals and pre-execution spectacles in Graeco-Roman cultures.⁶⁴ Ironically, this custom provided the fulfillment of specific OT foreshadowing. Cyril also pointed out the prophetic significance:

Again, when He had been judged before Pilate, He was clothed in scarlet purple; **for there they put on Him a purple robe.** Is this also

⁶³ The Rabbula Gospels, *The Crucifixion and the Resurrection*, Illumination on Vellum, Syria, A.D. 586, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana MS. Plut. I. 56; it is customary in Eastern art work to depict Christ robed on the cross out of respect, rather than stripped

⁶⁴ E.g., Philo in *Flaccum* 6.3-40; Plutarch *Pompey* 24.7-8; Seneca *Apocol* 8.2; Porphyry *Abst.* 2.54,56; Strabo *Geo.* 11.8.4-5. Describing another example of "spectacular" justice – during the Persian Sacian festival – Roman historian Dio Chrysostom writes: "They take one of the prisoners condemned to death and make him sit on a royal throne; they dress him in **royal robes**... but in the end they undress him, scourge him and hang him." [*Oration* IV. 66] Strabo (C. 512.5) says it was celebrated by the Persians with carousing in memory of a victory by Cyrus over the Sacae (called Σακαῖοι 512 ff.)

written? Isaiah saith, *Who is this that cometh from Edom? the redness of His garments is from Bosra* (Isa 53:1-2)⁶⁵ (*Catech* 13.27) Even earlier, the *Epistle of Barnabas* highlights the Azazel connection: [On the scapegoat they] “*place scarlet wool about its head,*⁶⁶ *and so let it be cast into the wilderness. . . . 9. What then meaneth this? Give heed. The one [goat] at the altar, and the other accursed. And moreover the accursed one crowned. For they shall see Him in that day wearing the long scarlet robe about His flesh, and shall say, ‘Is not this He, Whom once we crucified and set at nought?’*”⁶⁷ (*Barn* 7:9-8, alluding to Rev 1:7)

Other records document the mock enthroning of Christ. As Pilate returned to other business during the scourging, the soldiers re-appropriated his *bema*:

“And as the prophet spoke (Mic 5:1⁶⁸), they tormented Him, and set Him on the judgment-seat, and said, ‘Judge us’” (Justin *Apol* 1.35⁶⁹).

Peter again alludes to Isaiah’s “Suffering Servant” prophecy in this regard: “Who His own self bare⁷⁰ our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins,⁷¹ should live unto righteousness:⁷² **by whose ‘stripes ye were healed.’**” (1Pet 2:24, quoting Isa 53:5⁷³)

Though the application of this verse to Christ’s suffering was vehemently denied by Jews in the early days of Christianity, the convicting power of this passage finally gave way to the admission among medieval Jews that

⁶⁵ See also Gen 49:11 “and he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes” these words are interpreted of the Messiah in the *Targums of Jonathan* and *Jerusalem*, and are applied to him and his times in the Talmud {TB *Berac.* 57a), and in other Jewish writings {*Zohar* in Gen. fol 27.3 &128.2-3}.

⁶⁶ This detail of the ritual is confirmed by m.*Yoma* 4.2; cp Heb 9:19

⁶⁷ Cp. Mark 9:12 And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought; Acts 4:11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner; Isa 53:3 He was despised, and we esteemed him not.

⁶⁸ Mic 5:1 “they shall smite the **judge of Israel** with a rod upon the cheek.”; medieval Jewish commentator Aben Ezra admits ‘the judge’ is the Messiah; compare Ignatius of Antioch: “He who was Himself **the Judge** was **judged** by the Jews, falsely so called, and by Pilate the governor; was scourged , was smitten on the cheek, was spit upon; He wore a crown of thorns and a purple robe” [*ad Trall* 10]

⁶⁹ *Gospel of Peter*: “And they put on him a purple robe, and made him sit upon the **seat of judgment**, 8 saying: ‘**Give righteous judgment**, thou King of Israel.’” [3:7-8]; according to Justin & *G. Peter*, and the Turfan *Gospel fragments*, the Jewish authorities also joined in.

⁷⁰ Combining here of Isa 53:12; De 21:23

⁷¹ Compare Isa 53:10, “Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin.” Peter thus means by “bare” what the Syriac takes two words to express, *to bear* (carry) and *to offer*.

⁷² Compare Isa 53:11. ‘My righteous servant shall justify many’

⁷³ “and by His stripes (*chābhūrāh* = *chabbūrāh*, [Isa 1:6](#)) we have been healed,” *shālōm* is defined as a condition of salvation brought about by healing. “*Venustissimum ὀξύμωρον*,” exclaims Vitringa here. He means the same as Jerome when he says, *suo vulnere vulnera nostra curavit*. The stripes and weals that were inflicted upon Him have made us sound and well (LXX keeps the collective singular, and renders it very aptly τῶ μάλωπι αὐτοῦ; cf., [1Pe 2:24](#)).”[K&D] wtrbxb “per livorem ejus”, Munster; “livore ejus”, V. L. Montanus, Vatablus; “tumice ejus”, Junius & Tremellius; “vibico ejus”, Cocceius; “vibicibus ejus” Vitringa.

the “Suffering Servant” was indeed a prophecy of the Messiah, and specifically as regards the flagellation predicted:

"this is the King Messiah, who was in the generation of the ungodly, as it is said, Isa 53:5 ‘and with his stripes we are healed’; and for this cause God saved him, that he might save Israel, and rejoice with them in the resurrection of the dead." (R. [MOSES HA-DARSHAN](#) ⁷⁴)

St. Ephraem remarks:

"The very column must have quivered as if it were alive, the cold stone must have felt that the Master was bound to it who had given it its being. The column shuddered knowing that the Lord of all creatures was being scourged"

And he adds, as a marvel, witnessed even in his own day, that the "column had contracted with fear beneath the Body of Christ." This porphyry column of flagellation was recovered from the ruins of the *praetorium* by St Helena.

The Byzantine church erected a basilica on the spot, and this column was described by Sophronius of Jerusalem around AD 600, just before its destruction during the Persian conquest of Jerusalem in AD 614 - the church was never rebuilt:

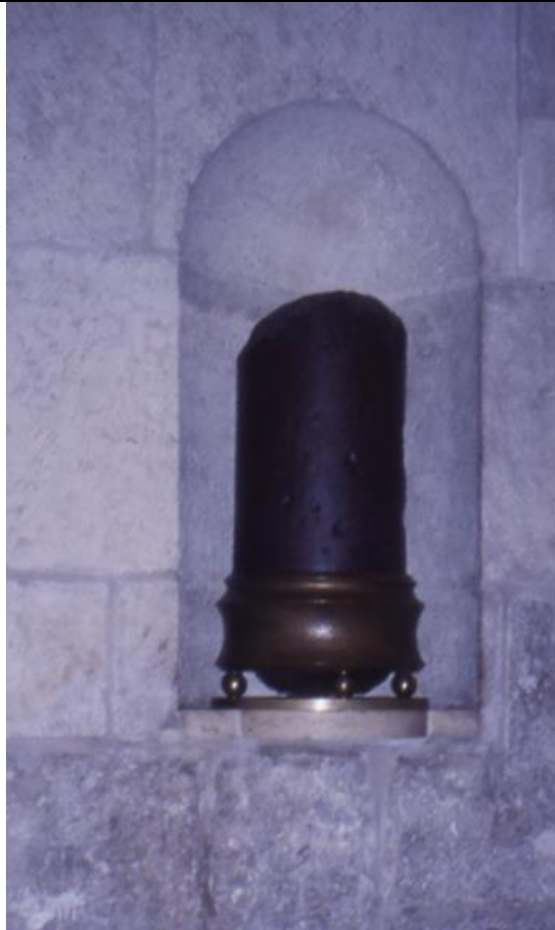
Then let me leave Sion's summit and, embracing the stone where for me my Creator was smitten down to the House and the Stone; And let me fall to the ground and venerate –I am oppressed by tears! the spot there the foremost of those who love Wisdom heard his own sentence. ⁷⁵

⁷⁴ French Rabbinic exegete; lived at Narbonne about the middle of the eleventh century; quotation via P. Galatin. [*De Aeanis catholicis Veritatis* 1518] 6.2; similar rabbinic exegesis includes: "chastisements are divided into three parts, one to David and the fathers, one to our generation, and one to the King Messiah; as it is written, 'he was wounded for our transgressions; and bruised for our iniquities'" [Mechilta apud *Yalkut*, par.2. fol 90.1]; "at that time they shall declare to the Messiah the troubles of Israel in captivity, and the wicked which are among them, that do not mind to know the Lord; he shall lift up his voice, and weep over the wicked among them; as it is said, 'he was wounded for our transgressions, &c.'" [*Zohar* in Exod. fol. 85. 2]; cf.. *Midrash Ruth*, fol. 33. 2. *Yalkut Simeoni*, par.2. fol. 53.3;

⁷⁵ [[ANACREONTICON 20:73-80](#) (ca. 600 A.D.)] *The Holy Wisdom (Praetorium)*. Matt 27:11-31 (Pilate questions Jesus)[Sophronius]

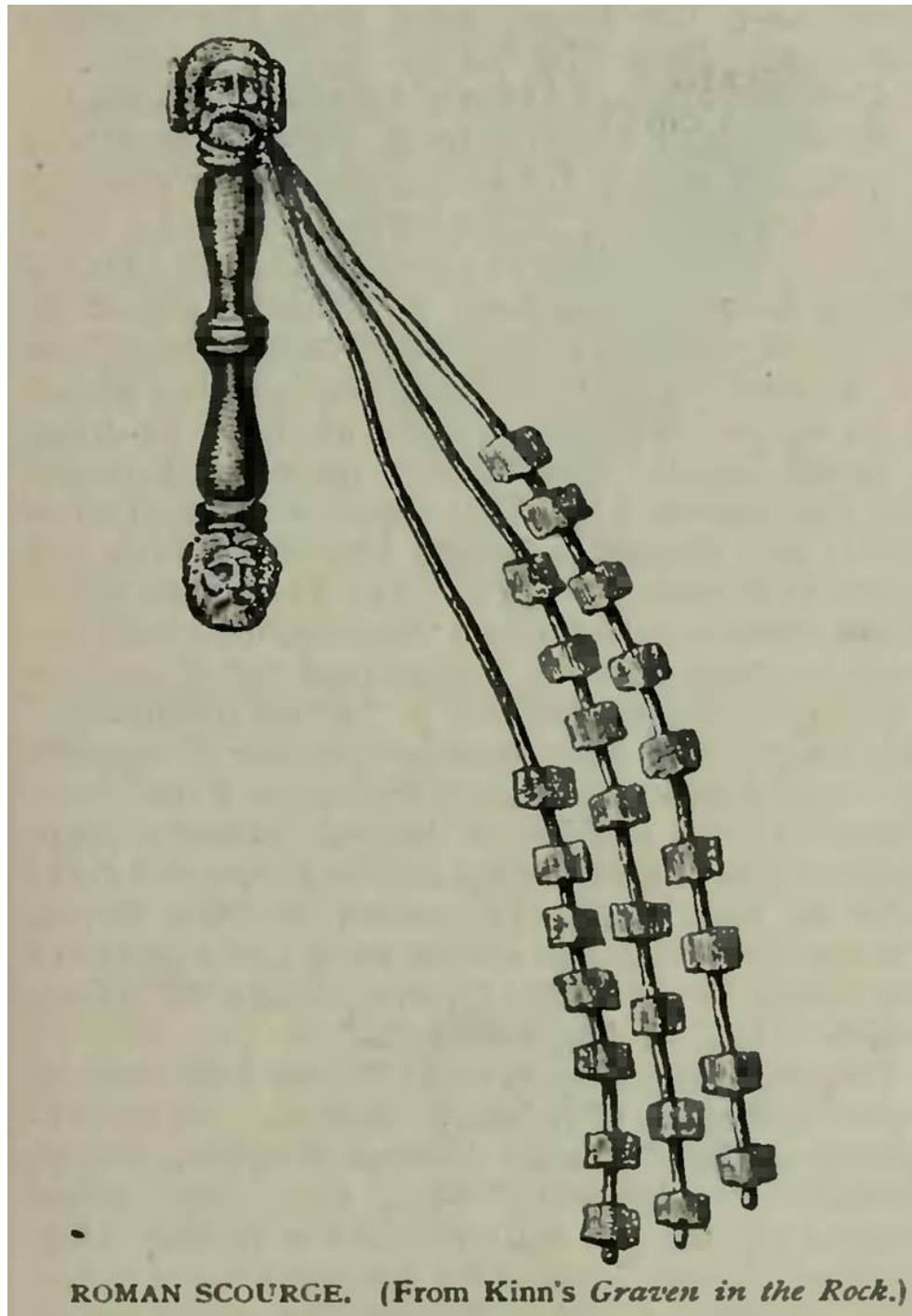


Located in the southeast corner of the nave of the Church of St. George in Constantinople, this column is one its most treasured and ancient relics; brought there by St. Helen, the mother of Emperor Constantine after she visited the Holy Land, the hole for the attachment of the manacle is still visible



A considerable fragment of the same porphyry pillar, of about 30 cm in diameter, is preserved in Jerusalem and shown to the pilgrims in the Franciscan Chapel inside the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

This infliction of punishment was upon the naked back of the sufferer (Juvenal vi. 477) and sometimes fatal in and of itself (Hor. *Sat.* i.2, 41). It was carried out by a class of person called *lorarii*. Roman flagellation was brutal, and not limited to the Jewish “40 lashes” (e.g., 2Cor 11:24). Examples of the Roman *flagrum* from the time of Christ have been preserved,⁷⁶ showing the gratuitous cruelty involved; the Latin writer Horace simply referred to it as the *horribili flagello* (*Sat* i.3, 119).



Pilate hoped that the public humiliation and scourging of Christ would provide *satisfacere alicui*⁷⁷ - doing what is sufficient to satisfy and remove the ground of complaint. Now bloodied and battered, Christ would be represented to the mob, as Pilate again moves for an acquittal:

“Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, ‘Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that **I find no fault in him.**’ 5 Then came Jesus forth [through the veil], wearing the crown

⁷⁷ Paul., Fr. xxxviii; Digest. "De Punis", XLVIII, 19, and "Sent.", V, 221; Dion., V, 52; Josephus, "Antiq.", XIII, xxii, and "Bell. Jud.", II, iii;

of thorns, and the purple robe, And *Pilate* saith unto them, ‘Behold the man’!” [John 19:4](#)

This exclamatory introduction of Jesus to the mob, in mock coronation robes, was clearly intended to elicit pity and to show how absurd the charge of the Sanhedrin was that such a pitiable figure should be guilty of treason. His attempt to sway the growing crowd of spectators may have worked back at Rome, where the circus audience may have recognized such gross public humiliation as sufficient punishment for a “petty poser”:

When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, “Crucify him, crucify him.” Pilate saith unto them, “Take **ye** him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him” [John 19:6](#); And they cried out all at once, saying, “Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas:” [John 19:8](#) (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison). Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, “Crucify him, crucify him” And he said unto them the **third time**, “Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go.” [Luke 23:19-22](#); The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God”. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid. [John 19:7-8](#)

Pilate calls an immediate recess in light of yet another new charge. He orders Jesus back to his chambers for one last “closed door” session to see if Christ has any defense to the latest charge: “and he entered **into the Praetorium again**, and saith unto Jesus, ‘Whence art thou?’ But Jesus gave him no answer” (John 18:9). When Christ refuses to mount a defense for Himself against the charges, Pilate is left without any more legal maneuvers; he finally and formally resumes the trial for its final phase – sentencing

▣ And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, “If thou let this man go, thou art not **Caesar’s friend** [Vulgate: *amicus caesaris*⁷⁸]: whosoever maketh himself a king

⁷⁸ “Friend of Caesar” (or *amicus Caesaris*) had a specific connotation at the time of a personal and favored relationship with the emperor that also demanded a greater responsibility toward the emperor.[A. N. Sherwin-White *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1963): 47n. Compare Herod

speakeeth against Caesar.” 13 When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat. [John 19:12](#)

The Temple Hierarchy having made this unveiled threat against Pilate’s privileged relationship with Emperor Tiberius – to whom he answered directly – Pilate responds as one might expect. He assumes a more defensive posture while maintaining an air of ultimate authority. He continues officiating from his *bema*, when interrupted by yet another new development:

▣ Matt 27:19 When he was set down on the judgment seat his wife sent unto him, saying, “Have thou nothing to do with that **just man**: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.”

Pilate as a devout, even superstitious, pagan had no desire to ignore a “divine dream” – much less to be involved with the execution of a possible “son of God.” Perhaps, the almost prophetic words Plato⁷⁹ started to ring in his ear on the occasion of this greatest injustice:

“What they will say is this: that such being his disposition the **just man** will have to endure the lash, the rack, chains, the branding iron in his eyes, and finally, after every extremity of suffering, he will be **crucified**.” [*Republic II* (362e)]

He was willing to accept the verdict of the *acclamatio populi*, but still wanted to offer an “11th hour” imperial pardon. Pilate recalls Christ to the gallery.

And it was the preparation of the Passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, “Behold your King!” But they cried out, “Away with *him*, away with *him*, crucify him.” Pilate saith unto them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.” [John 19:14-15]

Whipped into a frenzy by Temple authorities, they were on the verge of “tumult” [Matthew 27:24]. Pilate’s immediate priority became avoiding an

Agrippa’s usage of the title “friend of Caesar” on his own coins (<http://www.christusrex.org/www1/ofm/sbf/Books/LA47/47429KL.pdf>). It became an official title by the time of Vespasian.

⁷⁹Among the writings of 7th-century abbot of Sinai, Anastasios, there is a story which relates that it was the custom of a certain learned Christian to curse Plato daily, until eventually Plato himself appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Man, stop cursing me; for you are merely harming yourself. I do not deny that I was a sinner; but, when Christ descended into hell, no one believed in Him sooner than I did’ [PG 89:764C].

all out riot, thus the entire Jerusalem crowd sealed the fate of the Christ. Pilate accepted the *acclamatio populi*, and would continue to claim it was their sentence and not his own.

“Pilate, willing to content the people,⁸⁰ released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged *him*, to be crucified.”

Mark 15:15

Again, we see the Latin *satisfacere alicui* - doing whatever will satisfy the ground of complaint - come into play:

“And Pilate gave sentence (επεκρινεν – written decree) that it should be as **they** (i.e. the *populi*) required.” Luke 23:24

Pilate had to report an official sentence (even though some Church Fathers refused to attribute it directly to Pilate),⁸¹ and the Gospels do not deny that it was Pilate himself who made the *titulus damnationis*.⁸²

Jesus Christ was ultimately condemned for the crime of sedition and tumult,⁸³ *perduellio* – “high treason” – for which the only sentence was death by crucifixion.

The final dramatic gesture performed in front of the demanding crowd is his ceremonial hand washing.⁸⁴ In later accounts, the religious and theatrical aspects are heightened:

“And now he that is uncircumcised in flesh [Pilate], but circumcised in heart, has taken water, and washed his hands **in the face of the sun**, saying, ‘I am innocent of the blood of this just man; see ye to it’” (*Acta Pilati*)⁸⁵

This ancient custom emphasized that every legal sentence was also a religious declaration.⁸⁶ It was also perfectly consistent with the ancient

⁸⁰ τῷ ὄχλῳ τοῦ ἱκανὸν ποιῆσαι = A Latin idiom. This same phrase in Greek occurs in Polybius, Appian, Diogenes Laertes, and in late papyri

⁸¹ Tertullian says it was “extorted” [*Apol* 21], and that Jesus was merely “surrendered” to the crowd [*on Prayer* 13]; Lactantius similarly denies that Pilate did the actual sentencing [*Div Inst* 4:18]. Baronius points out that Pilate’s sentence was technically illegal, since Roman standards required at least 2 days of hearings prior to sentencing for capital cases – a dismissal could, of course be done sooner, and this is what Pilate was hoping for.

⁸² The *Apostolic Constitutions* refers to “the sentence of condemnation from Pilate” (8.4[34]) and the *Acta Pilati* has him say “On this account I sentence thee, first to be scourged, according to the enactment of venerable kings, and then to be fastened on the cross.” [*G.Nic* 1.9] Formerly pronounced by the *duoviri perduellionis*. Compare Livy *History* 1.26: “The dreadful language of the law was: ‘The duumvirs shall judge cases of treason; if the accused appeal from the duumvirs the appeal shall be heard; if their sentence be confirmed the lictor shall hang him by a rope on the fatal tree and shall scourge him either within or without the *pomoerium*.’ The duumvirs appointed under this law did not think that by its provisions they had the power to acquit even an innocent person.” [POMOERIUM. This word is compounded of post and moerium (murus), in the same manner as pomeridium of post and meridiem, and thus signifies a line running by the walls of a town (pone or post muros)]

⁸³ As would many of the Apostles; see John Malalas, *Chronogr.* X.

⁸⁴ Compare: Ah! Too facile, to think the dark guilt of murder, Could be washed away by river water! [Ovid, ‘*Fast*’: ii. 48.] Also, Anticlidis Redit. l. 74. Triclinius in *Ajac.* Sophocl. 3. 1

⁸⁵ *G.Nic* 1.12, “quoting” Joseph of Arimathea, [1st Greek & Latin eds.]

⁸⁶ “and those that preside, when they have received their accusations from those that brought them, . . . pass the final decree and suffrage of death against him, **lifts up his hands to the sun**, and solemnly affirms that he is innocent of the blood of the man” [*Apost Const* 2.6.52].

Biblical injunction that was supposed to accompany a capital sentence (See Deut 21:6-9; also Ps 26:6 & 73:13), but here performed (with irony worthy of Sophocles) by a pagan priest.⁸⁷

As the final sentence was based on a second charge, it required its own scourging (cp. Livy *Hist* 1.26):

- ▣ “And the soldiers led him away into the hall”⁸⁸ [Mark 15:16](#) “Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall [πραίτωριον], and gathered unto him **the whole band**” [Mt 27:27](#)

The four soldiers [John 19:23], the usual quaternion [*tetradion* Acts 12:9] assigned to crucifixion detail, in turned gathered the σπειρα⁸⁹ - the entire contingent of ~1000 soldiers - for the spectacle of the scourging.



Fresco in catacomb of Praetextatus: Christ wearing crown of thorns and smitten with reed [early 2nd century], tinted photograph, above; artist's reconstruction below

⁸⁷ The so-called *Gospel of Peter* says that Pilate washed his hands when the Jews refused to do so.

⁸⁸ αὐλή - among the Greeks in Homer's time, an uncovered space around the house, enclosed by a wall; in *Koine* Greek, the uncovered courtyard of the house, or in this case, the **praetorium**

⁸⁹ “These Latin words are natural here in the atmosphere of the court and the military environment” [ROBERTSON'S]



Still wearing the *crown of thorns*, “they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head” [Mt 27:30](#), “**whereby they drove the sharp points of the thorns into it, which must give him inexpressible pain and torture**” [GILL]

Chapter 2

A number of times, Luke refers to the Christian faith simply as the “**way**.”⁹⁰ Christ Himself stated “strait⁹¹ is the gate, and narrow is **the way**, which leadeth unto life” (Matt 7:14).

There are a multitude of Old Testament passages that contrast the “way of life” with the “way of death,”⁹² the “way of the Lord” with the “way of the Heathen” (Jer 10:2). Christ’s teaching and use of this term, however, appears paradoxical when contrasted with the OT dichotomy:

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matt 16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24, 17:33) “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” (John 12:25)

Not only is this “**way**” paradoxical, it is radical:

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me:
and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.
And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. [Mt 10:37-38]

This is nothing less than the “**way** of the Cross.” As His disciple Peter taught those he was ‘discipling,’ “For unto this are you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should **follow his steps**” [1Pet 2:21].

This “way” was foreshadowed in the suffering of Job, and very specifically when he states:

Oh that one would hear me! behold, my desire [תִּי], that the Almighty would answer me, and that mine adversary had written a book [סֵפֶר].

⁹⁰ Acts 19:9, 22:4, 24:14,22; cp Acts 16:17, 18:25,26

⁹¹ Instead of οτι “because”, τι “how” is read by many MSS., versions, and fathers: “How strait is that gate!” στενή πύλη, signifies literally a *wicket*, i.e. a little door in a large gate. Compare the Mishnaic Hebrew *Pishpesh*: “With a key he opened the little door, and out of *Beth-mokad* [the place of the fire-hearth], he entereth into the court” [m. *Tamid* 1:3]. “The gate of repentance” is mentioned by the Chaldee paraphrast upon Jer 33:6. A remarkable parallel occurs in the Greek *Pinax* or *Tablet of Cebes* [sometimes known as the “Greek *Pilgrim’s Progress*”] 15:1-4 ““Seest thou not, then, a little door, and a way before the door, which is not much crowded, but very few travel it? This is the way which leadeth into true instruction” – perhaps inspired by Christ’s words? [since the date of composition is usually given 1st-2nd cent AD]

⁹² E.g., Jer 21:8 “And unto this people thou shalt say, ‘Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death.’”; cp. Pr 15:24 “The way of life is above [ascending] to the wise, that he may depart from hell [*sheol*] beneath.” Pr 21:16 “The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.”

Surely I would take it [the תו] upon my shoulder, and bind it [the סָפָר] as a crown to me.

I would declare unto him the number of **my steps**; as a prince would I go near unto him.

If my land cry against me.... [Job 31:35-38]

What Job pleaded, Christ fulfilled. "Behold, my desire" (or as the margin translates "my sign" - the mark of signature), was originally a cross [ת= X in paleo-Hebrew], so that Job literally says "Behold: my cross!" - and then vows to carry it on his shoulder.

The "book" of his adversary is the *libellum scribat meus adversarius*⁹³-the indictment now lying before them. As Clarke paraphrased the passage, according to ancient custom,

"I would be contented to stand before the bar as a criminal, bearing [around my neck] the board to which the accusation is affixed."

The Early Church saw the suffering and patience of Job⁹⁴ as a type of Christ's passion, and it is so depicted on early catacomb frescoes and sarcophagi sculptures.⁹⁵

⁹³ *scribat meus adversarius* (Dachselt, Rosenm., Welte); *liber quem scripsit adversarius meus* (Keil&Delitzsch)

⁹⁴ James 5:11 "Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye **have heard** [a reference to the reading of this book as part of an early Church lection cycle?] of **the patience of Job**, and **have seen** the end of the Lord [Jesus]." [Bede follows Augustine in understanding it of the death of Christ, which no doubt many of the readers of the Epistle had witnessed—"Exitum quoque Domini in cruce quem longanimiter suscepit, adstantes ipsi vidistis"]; and the remarkable insertion in the *Vulgate* Version of *Tobit* ii. 12ff: "This trial the Lord therefore permitted to happen to Him, that an example might be given to posterity of his patience, as also of holy Job."

⁹⁵ "Job, seated on a heap of ashes, or on a dunghill, visited by his friends and reproached by his wife, is found on Christian art monuments with some degree of frequency. It appears in the [catacomb](#) frescoes (Bosio, p. 307; Bottari, tav. cv. ; Perret, torn. i., pi. xxv.; Bottari, tav. xci.) and on sarcophagi, though more frequently in southern France than in Italy. There are examples in the Museum of Aries and Lyons (Millin, *u. s.* pi. xlvii. 1). The best representation of the scene is on the tomb of Junius Bassus, A.D. 359 (left-hand corner of the lower tier). In a [fresco](#) given by Bottari (tav. xci.), and Bosio (p. 307), [Job](#) holds a potsherd with which he is scraping his leg." William Smith, William George Smith, Samuel Cheetham – 1880 [A dictionary of Christian antiquities: comprising the history, ...: Volume 2 - Page 1459](#)



The Suffering of Job; detail from the Christian sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, *praefectus urbi* of Rome, died AD 359.

For example, Hippolytus read Job 6:27b (“you barter for your friend”⁹⁶) as a direct address about Christ to his brother-betrayers:

“And like the great Job, addressing you who speak against the Righteous and True One, He says, "Thou didst barter the Christ like a slave, thou didst go to Him like a robber in the garden."” *Expository Treatise* 8; in *PG* 10:791

It was thus the custom after the second century to read the book of Job in the churches during passion-week.⁹⁷ In this light, Christ asks us, in the voice of Job, to “number [*count, consider, copy*] his steps” on the road to Calvary. Indeed, the spectacle of the procession began with the ceremonial preparation of the *titulus* for the condemned to carry to the cross.

⁹⁶ Keil&Delitsch “The verb כָּרַח, however, does not here signify to dig, so that שָׂחָה, a pit, should be supplied (Heiligst.), still less: dig out earth, and cast it on any one (Ebrard); but has the signification of **buying and selling** with לָקַח of the object, exactly like Job 39:27.

⁹⁷ Vid. Origen's *Opp.* t. ii. p. 851: *In conventu ecclesiae in diebus sanctis legitur passio Iob, in diebus jejuniis, in diebus abstinentiae, in diebus, in quibus tanquam compatiuntur ei qui jejunt et abstinent admirabili illo Iob, in diebus, in quibus in jejunio et abstinentia sanctam Domini nostri Jesu Christi passionem sectamur.* Known thus from the public reading in the churches, Job was called among the Syrians, *Machbono*, the Beloved, the Friend (Ewald, *Jahrb.* x. 207).

Several 4th-century writers reported on the recovery of Christ's *titulus* from his tomb in AD 325.⁹⁸ The *titulus*, as rediscovered in 1492, matches everything we know of Roman customs of the time: the name and misdeeds of the criminal were inscribed on a title (*Tabula, Tabella, Titulus, Litterae*).



This title was carried before the condemned on his way to the place of execution, (Suetonius, *Caligula* 32; Eus. *H.E.* V.i.19) and then hung above his head if he was crucified.¹⁰⁰

What made Christ's *titulus* unique was its **trilingual** inscription, as attested to by: John 19, eye-witnesses Sozomen and Rufinus, and confirmed by Priscillian (*tract* i.25-29).¹⁰¹ This was NOT merely a way of making sure everyone understood the sentence; it was a matter legal exigency:

⁹⁸ e.g. "There was found separately, a tablet inscribed with the words *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*, the language and letters being Hebrew, Greek, and Latin." [Sozomen, *H.E.* ii.1.6; The *Church History* of Sozomenos was written about 444, not even 120 years after the *inventio crucis*; compare Rufinus, *H.E.* i.7] Interestingly we find this detail -the chalk painting- also mentioned in the *Church History* of Sozomenos, who, born in Gaza about 370-80, still met eye witnesses of the finding of the cross in his youth and added further details to the description given by his forerunner Socrates Scholasticus [Socrates Scholasticus *Ecclesiastical History* 1.17]. The fact that Sozomenos, in variation from St. John, gave the order of the lines exactly as it is on our relic, indicates that his report indeed represents the earliest description of it. The *titulus* was mentioned by the pilgrimess Egeria/Aetheria, a French nun who stayed in Palestine between 381 and 384 AD, who witnessed its veneration in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on Good Friday 383 AD: "The casket is opened and (the wood) is taken out, and both the wood of the Cross and the title are placed upon the table . . . And as all the people pass by one by one, all bowing themselves, they touch the Cross and the title, first with their foreheads and then with their eyes; . . . With these was also found the **tablet** [σάνίς 'board'] of Pilate, on which he had inscribed in various characters, that the Christ who was crucified was "**king of the Jews**"."

⁹⁹ Etching from Charles Rohault de Fleury's *Mémoire sur les instruments de la Passion* 1870

¹⁰⁰ The title was prepared by painting a piece of board white, termed an *album*: "This word, which in general means anything white or whitened, was especially used to signify tablets, notice-boards, and the whitewashed wall spaces on which it was customary to write in red or black letters [Quintilian, *Inst. or.* xii.3; Ovid, *Fast.* i.-ii; Martial, xi.5,5; xii.26.5] all sorts of advertisements and public notices" - Daremberg and Saglio, *Dict. des antiquités grecques et romaines*, art. "Album"

¹⁰¹ *Priscillianique vae* by Priscillian, ed. Georg Schepss - 1889, p.26

- ▣ Latin was the official language for all **Roman** proclamations and legal sentences. Conquered peoples were expected to learn enough Latin to read regulatory signs and announcements.
- ▣ Greek was often the *lingua franca* of the Empire, but it meant more in this case: it was the official language of the Hellenized court of the **Herodian** dynasty. It was a sign of their involvement and responsibility in the execution .
- ▣ Hebrew remained the *official* language for all Sanhedrin rulings and proclamations; that the *titulus* included a Hebrew¹⁰² version of the conviction was Pilate's acknowledgment of the **Temple** hierarchy's approbation and collaboration regarding the sentence.

This political and theological point was not lost on Prudentius (*fl.* end of the 4th-cent), who was inspired to write a hymn upon seeing it:

“The Hebrew pen, the fullness of Athens, and third the eloquent tongue of Italy are all composing them. Pilate in his ignorance gives command: "Go, scribe, set out in lines thrice inscribed what power it is that is crucified. On the head of the cross let there be a threefold superscription; in the three tongues, as they read, let Judaea recognize and Greece know God, and golden Rome worship Him while she scans the words” (*Apotheosis*, lines 385ff).

John tells us that Pilate himself wrote it (19:19), and John alone uses the technical Latin word *titlon* for the board.¹⁰³ The *titulus* was thus bound to play a major role, not only in the sentencing, but in the procession, crucifixion, and even the entombment. Focusing on its role in the Roman procession-spectacle, many writers of the time give insight into the psycho-dynamic effect of the entire event. It began with the tribunal handing over the condemned to the executioner.¹⁰⁴ A sense of pageantry

¹⁰² That the *titulus* having a Hebrew, not Aramaic, inscription is specifically pointed out in the Aramaic works of *Book of the Bee* ch. 44, and the *Cave of Treasures* 49b.2f.

¹⁰³ which the Syriac, Arabic, and Persian versions render as “tablet.” At Matt 26:37, the Vulgate renders it “His case [*causam*] written”; The Syriac and Persic versions translate it, “the cause of his death”.

¹⁰⁴ Dio Cassius reports a typical example: “Now that he took these measures, not in anger, but as really conducive to the public good, he gave very strong proof; 7 . . . [they] led him through the midst of the Forum with an **inscription** making known the reason why he was to be put to death, and afterwards crucified him” [54.3.6-7]; compare Suetonius *Caligula* 32, *Domitian* 10, Eusebius *EH* 5.1.44

about Roman justice demanded a parade of the condemned through the busiest street of the city, and not merely the shortest route to the stage of execution.¹⁰⁵

The path itself was prophesied, and Herod the Great, Christ's persecutor at birth, helped fulfill Christ's journey to Golgotha on this *Via Dolorosa*. God had foretold to His servant Daniel that before the Messiah came to Jerusalem, this very path would be rebuilt:

“Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: **the street** shall be built again, and **the wall**, even in troublous times.”
[Dan 9:25, AV]

The words can also be translated as follows:

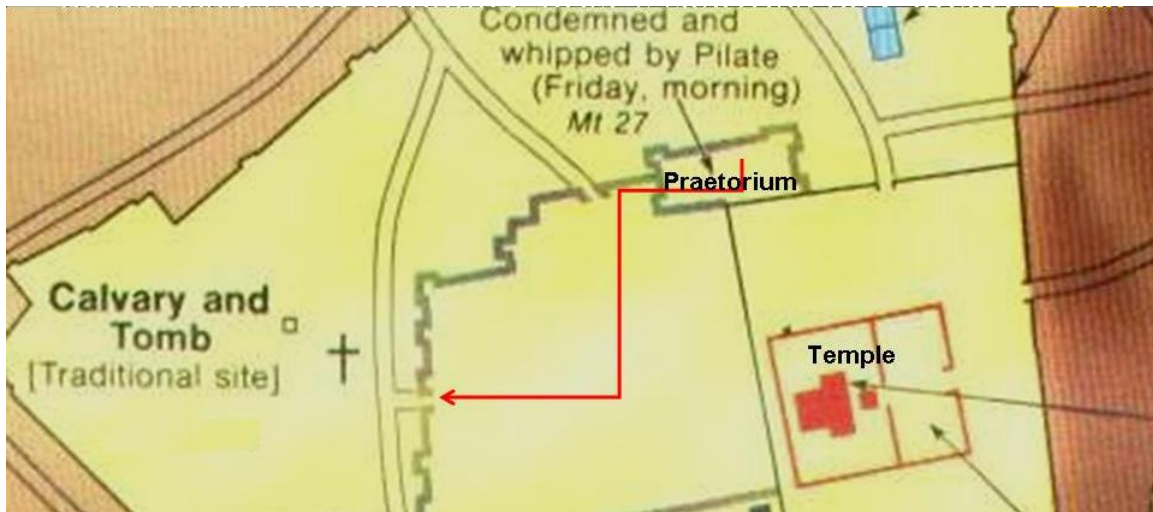
“Jerusalem will be restored and rebuilt with **a city square** and **a moat** during the troubles of those times.” [GWV]

This is essentially either end of the “parade route” - and the actual path that Christ's death march took. It started from the reinforced wall of Antonia Fortress¹⁰⁶ (with the defensive moat¹⁰⁷ to its north, rebuilt by Herod), continued down to the main east-west thoroughfare through Jerusalem, and culminated at the city square, just outside the main western gate.

¹⁰⁵ They would order the condemned: "Let him bear the *patibulum* through the city; then let him be nailed to the *crux*" [Plautus *Carbonaria*, fr. 2 (5)]. Clodius Licinius (1st-century BC) refers to the executioner who would "bind [the victims] to the cross-beam [*patibulum*]; then, they were made to go around [*circumferuntur*]¹⁰⁵ thus bound, and then nailed to the cross " (*Roman History*, 21). They would order the condemned: "Let him bear the *patibulum* through the city; then let him be nailed to the *crux*" [Plautus *Carbonaria*, fr. 2 (5)]. Clodius Licinius (1st-century BC) refers to the executioner who would "bind [the victims] to the cross-beam [*patibulum*]; then, they were made to go around [*circumferuntur*]¹⁰⁵ thus bound, and then nailed to the cross " (*Roman History*, 21). This procession through the city was thought of as an appeasement for the "gods."¹⁰⁵ Livy also provides examples of how it would be considered a typical part of festive occasions: "At an early hour of the day appointed for the games, before the show had begun, a certain householder had driven his slave, *bearing a yoke (furca)*, through the midst of the circus, scourging the culprit as he went." (*Roman History* 2.36.1). Prefigured in Jeremiah's persecution, etc: Jer 28:14 "For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'I have put a yoke of iron upon the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar"; La 3:27 "*It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth*"; cp Christ's call: Mt 11:29 "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"; Isa 58:6 "*Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every [other] yoke?*"

¹⁰⁶ "The tower of Antonia...was built upon a rock fifty cubits high and on all sides precipitous...the rock was covered from its base upwards with smooth flagstones" (Josephus *Jewish War*, V.v.8 para.238).

¹⁰⁷ Both destroyed by Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem in 63 BC: "**it had a trench** cut in rock, sixty feet in depth and two hundred and sixty feet in breadth; and, from the stone that had been hewn out, the wall of the temple was fenced with towers. Pompey seized the city, it is said, after watching for the day of fasting, when the Judeans were abstaining from all work; **he filled up the trench** and threw ladders across it; moreover, he gave orders to rase **all the walls**." [Strabo, *Geography* 16:2:40]; Cf. Josephus, *Ant* 14.57-63



Daniel also recorded the prophesied destruction of this Fortress, and Temple, after the rejection of Jesus as Messiah:

“And, arms, from him, will arise,—and will profane the sanctuary, the **fortress**, and will set aside the continual *ascending-sacrifice*, and place the horrid abomination that astoundeth.” [Dan 11:31, Rotherhams]

Titus attacked the fortress in AD 70, in exactly the same way Pompey had in 63 BC: by filling in the moat with dirt from up to 12 miles away (Josephus, *Wars* 6.148-151).



Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under the command of Titus, A.D. 70 by David Roberts

The city squares (and *broadway*¹⁰⁸ between them) in Jerusalem served the same sociological function of the “Forum” at Rome. At the Forum, an (open-air space for mass gatherings), a mix of Religion, Justice, entertainment, and executions mingled easily.¹⁰⁹

From the Jewish perspective, there was an awful sense of familiarity with this kind of spectacle. Pilate’s words regarding the *privilegium paschale* [Matt 27:15, Mark 15:6, Luke 23:17] suggests this parade of the condemned was at least an **annual affair**:

“This was so familiar to the Jews in New Testament times that they spoke frequently of “men carrying their cross before them while going to be executed.”¹¹⁰



From the imprints on the Turin Shroud, it can be deduced that the *patibulum* borne by Christ was more or less 13 centimeters wide, the very size of the crosspiece of the “Good Thief” among the relics at S. Croce Basilica¹¹¹

When Christ said “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mt 16:24), He was **not** using hyperbole, but referring to this ongoing reality of the annual Roman crucifixion procession. This walk of death so seared the historic memory

¹⁰⁸ See, e.g., Ezr 10:9 “Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and **all the people sat in the street of the house of God**, trembling because of this matter”; Neh 8:1 “And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into **the street that was before the water gate**; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe,” et al.

¹⁰⁹ “A certain man had handed over one of his slaves, with orders **to scourge him through the Forum**, and then put him to death. While they were executing this commission and tormenting the poor wretch, whose pain and suffering made him writhe and twist himself horribly, **the sacred procession in honor of Jupiter** chanced to come up behind” [Plutarch *Coriolanus* 24.4-5].

¹¹⁰ “(Gen.R. lvi; Pesiq.R. xxxi., ed. Buber, 143b)” [*Jewish Encyclopedia*, art. “Cross”].

¹¹¹

of the Jewish people that it became proverbial, and was a lens through which they began to view their own Biblical history:

““Abraham placed the wood of the burnt-offering on Isaac his son’ – **as a man who carries a cross on his shoulder**” (*Genesis Rabbah* 56:3¹¹²).



From the *Biblia Pauperum* [15th cent]; The text above the picture reads (in Latin): **"We read in Genesis, chapter 22, that when Abraham and Isaac went out together, Abraham carried a sword and fire, and Isaac carried the wood with which he was to be sacrificed. Isaac who carried the wood prefigured Christ who carried on His own body the wood of the cross on which He willed to be sacrificed for us."**

Christ not only carried His cross, but continued to bear the excruciating penetration of the crown of thorns on the way to Golgotha. This was not without theological significance of its own:

“And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put *it* upon his head . . . And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head” (Mt 27:29-30)

¹¹² A catena of Jewish exegesis on Genesis, redacted in the 5th century AD

In His suffering, He identified with Jerusalem & Judah, to the point of fulfilling Lam 1:14 -

“The yoke [of the crossbeam] of my transgressions is bound by His hand: they are wreathed [as a “crown of thorns”], and come up upon my neck.”

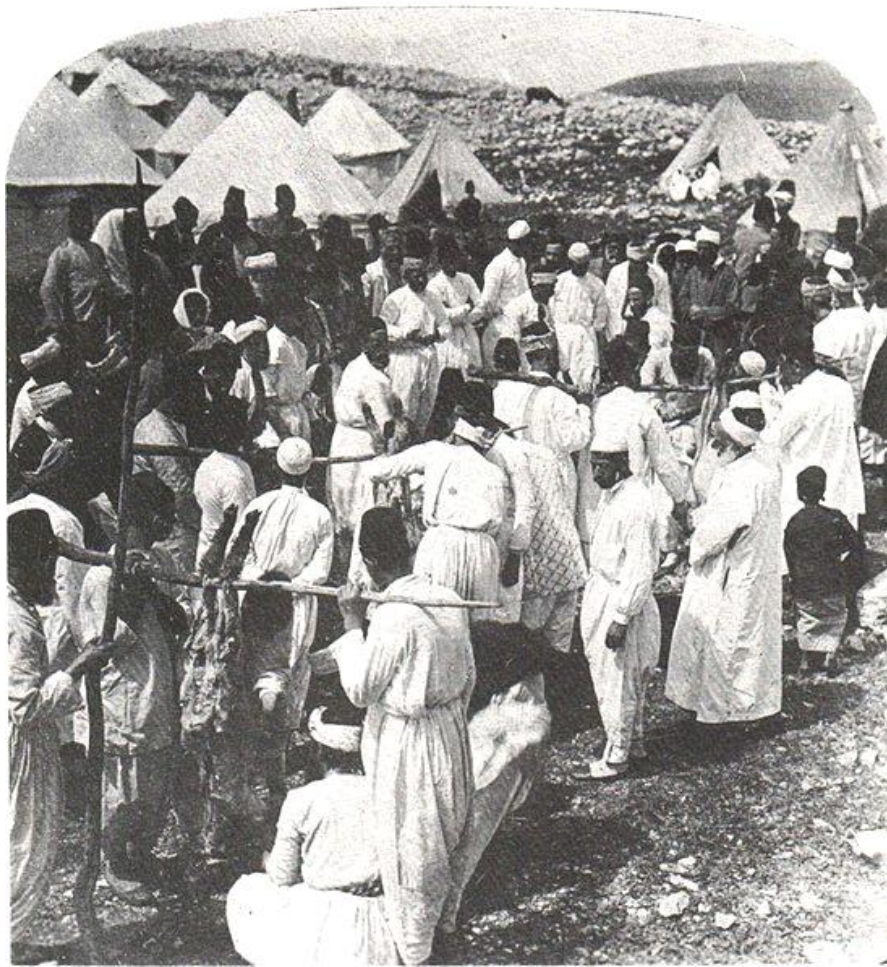
Architect and archeologist Charles Rohault de Fleury, based on his reconstruction of the “crown of thorns” from surviving relics, noted that:

"We are accustomed to think of the crown of thorns as a mere circlet resting on the temples, [but] . . . Judging from the relics extant, it was composed of two sorts of plants. There was a large wreath of reeds, bound together by filaments of reed, which served as a frame; so large was it that of itself it would have slipped down from the head to the shoulders . . . the thorns were interwoven and inserted into the wreath of reeds *thus diminishing its inner diameter*. So horrible was the torment which this cruel cap of thorns inflicted that the early Christians could not bear to represent it in its awful reality."¹¹³

In essence, this “crown of thorns” took on the appearance of a helmet. The festival crowds should not have missed the Passover parallels: on the day of this procession, the paschal lambs were also **paraded** while attached to **cross-like** spits [Justin M *Dial.* 40¹¹⁴], with their entrails wound around their heads, in the form of a *mequlas*, or “**helmet**” [m. *Pes* 7.1, Rashi on TB *Pes* 74a].

¹¹³ "This explanation of the forming of the crown removes what was formerly considered a great difficulty—how to account for the reedy circlet preserved at Notre Dame in Paris and the numerous thorns treasured in various places. The combination solves the difficulty satisfactorily." ["Instruments of the Passion" in *Messenger of The Sacred Heart*, March, 1897] Confirmed by St. Bridget: "The crown of thorns embraced his head most tightly, and came down as low as the middle of the forehead." [Rev. 1. 4, c. 70.]; Paulinus of Nola, writing after 409, refers to "the thorns with which Our Saviour was crowned" as relics held in honour along with the Cross to which He was nailed, and the pillar at which He was scourged (*Ep. ad Macar.* in Migne, P. L., LXI, 407). Cassiodorus (c. 570), when commenting on Ps. lxxxvi, speaks of the Crown of Thorns among the other relics which are the glory of the earthly Jerusalem. "There", he says, "we may behold the thorny crown, which was only set upon the head of Our Redeemer in order that all the thorns of the world might be gathered together and broken" (Migne, P. L., LXX, 621). Also Gregory of Tours ("*De gloriâ mart.*" in "*Mon. Germ. Hist.: Scrip. Merov.*", I, 492), etc

¹¹⁴ Lactantius *Div Inst* 4.18: "Esdras it is thus written: 'And Ezra said to the people, This **Passover is our Saviour** and our refuge. Consider and let it come into your heart, that we have to **abase Him in a figure**.'" [Justin Martyr also quotes this passage in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, and complains that it had been expunged by the Jews]



Samaritans bring their flayed Lambs for Passover [before 1900]

St. Vincent Ferrer taught that the crown was “intertwined with several branches of thorns, and fashioned like a helmet or hat, so that it fitted upon the whole of the head.”¹¹⁵ So it became . . .

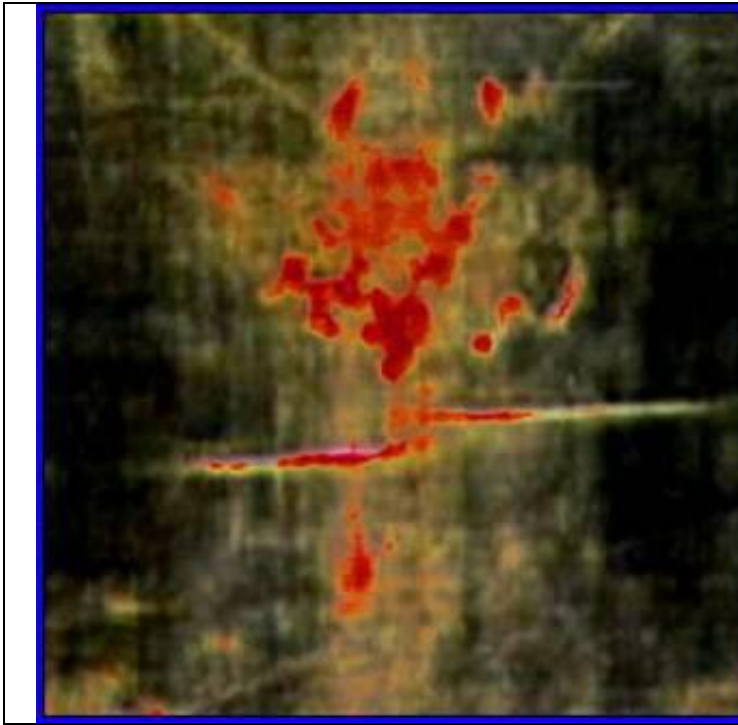
▣ Isa 59:17 “... a **helmet of salvation** upon His head; and He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.”

¹¹⁵ Domini Corona erat admodum pilei, ita at forum togebat caput [*Serm. in Parasc.*]



The “Crown of Thorns” as reconstructed by Rohault de Fleury from the “Relics of the Passion”
Tertullian points out the theological significance of the curse of the
“crown of thorns”:

“thorns...and thistles [Gen 3:18],—a figure of the sins which the soil
of the flesh brought forth for us, but which the power of the cross
removed, blunting, in its endurance by the head of our Lord, death’s
every sting.” [*The Chaplet*, 14]



**The Shroud of
Turin:
Blood from
wounds on
base of skull &
neck inflicted
by “Crown of
Thorns”**

As Cyril of Jerusalem put it:

“Adam received the sentence, *Cursed is the ground in thy labours; **thorns** and thistles shall it bring forth to thee* [Gen 3:17-18 LXX].

For this cause Jesus assumes **the thorns**, that He may cancel the sentence; for this cause also was He buried in the earth, that the earth which had been cursed might receive the blessing instead of a curse” [*Catech* 13.18]



“Man of Sorrows” by Lucas Cranach the Elder 1472 – 1553

Jesus redeemed the connotation of the “crown of thorns”¹¹⁶ – turning it into a triumphant “helmet of salvation” and more:

¹¹⁶ The *Epistle of Barnabas* 7:11 connects it also with the *Azazel* ceremony: “But what meaneth it, that they place the wool in the midst of the thorns? It is a type of Jesus set forth for the Church, since whosoever should desire to take away the scarlet wool it behooved him to suffer many things owing to the terrible nature of the thorn, and through affliction to win the mastery over it. Thus, He saith, ‘they that desire to see Me, and to attain unto My kingdom, must lay hold on Me through tribulation and affliction’.” [cp Acts 14:22]

“And the soldiers before they crucify Him, put on Him a purple robe, and set a crown on His head; for what though it be of thorns? Every king is proclaimed by soldiers; and Jesus also must in a figure be crowned by soldiers; so that for this cause the Scripture says in the Canticles, *Go forth, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, and look upon King Solomon in the crown wherewith His mother crowned Him*” (Songs 3:11) [Cyril of Jer. *Catech* 13.17]

“Go forth,” says St. Bernard, “and behold your king in a crown of poverty and misery.” [*In Epiph*, s. 2].

Again, we must be struck by the literalness of the Lord’s demand in its historical and prophetic context:

“If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me” [Matt 16:24]. “Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.” [Luke 14:27]

It was a commitment to subjecting oneself to the cruelest spectacle yet designed. Every individual and group within the community had a designated part to play in the drama of this “spectacle” – including [but not limited to]:

- 1) The Crowds¹¹⁷
- 2) The Executioners
- 3) The Condemned
- 4) The Heralds
- 5) The Mourners

As we have seen, the practice of the Romans¹¹⁸ was to make criminals bear their own cross to the place of execution [John 19:17].

¹¹⁷ *En route*, the crowds were expected to participate. Tacitus, [*Annals* XVI, 25-26] in cataloguing the abuses to which a defendant could be subjected, lists: 1) *ludibria*: mockeries, sports, jests; 2) *contumeliae*: insults, invectives; 3) *convicia*: reviling, abuse, and also blows; 4) *probria*: infamous words or acts; 5) *manus ictusque*: blows of the hands.

¹¹⁸ Plutarch uses this very practice as a didactic example: “Every kind of wickedness produces its own particular torment, just as every malefactor, when he is brought forth to execution, carries his own cross.”



4th-century¹¹⁹ Ivory relief depicting Christ carrying His cross, after Pilate washes his hands

In this respect, Roman “spectacle” worked well with the Hebrew ethic of public execution. When someone had been judged worthy of stoning, the entire community was obligated to turn out, and participate:

- ▣ Lev 20:2 “Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel,...he shall surely be put to death: the people of the land shall stone him with stones.”
- ▣ Deut 21:21 “And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear him.”

The executioners were encouraged to **goad** or **lash** the condemned as they carried their crucifix on the way.¹²⁰ One ancient account of the Passion describes the following, consistent with Roman custom:

¹¹⁹ “These British Museum panels have been assigned by the Museum authorities to the fifth century, but there can be little doubt that they should be classed with the other fourth century works they so closely resemble.” [W. R. Lethaby, “EARLY CHRISTIAN ART” in [The Cambridge Medieval History - Volume 1 - Page 604](#), 1911]

“Others stood and did **spit** in His eyes, and others buffeted His cheeks; and others did **prick Him** with a **reed**, and some of them **scourged Him**, saying “With this honor let us honor the Son of God’.” [*Gosp. Peter* 3:9]

Paul also shared in this particularly Roman “suffering of Christ”: “Three times I have been beaten with rods” [2Cor 11:25]. Never merely a form of torture, it was again a *sacred* ritual, synchronized with “the Spectacle.”¹²¹

This ritualized abuse was not unique to the Romans – it had become an integral part of Israel’s celebration of the Day of Atonement [Yom Kippur] in the *āzaz’el* ceremony.

The acting High Priest would “lay hands” on the chosen goat [Lev 16:21, cp Matt 26:65-67] transferring the peoples’ sins onto the offering [Justin *Dial* 40]. Before being led to “perdition,” the *āzaz’el* goat would be ‘crowned’ with scarlet wool:

““and place **scarlet wool about its head**,’¹²² and so let it be cast into the wilderness...9. What then means this? Give heed: ‘The one [goat] at the altar, and the other accursed.’ And moreover, **the accursed one crowned**” [*Barn* 7.8 -9].

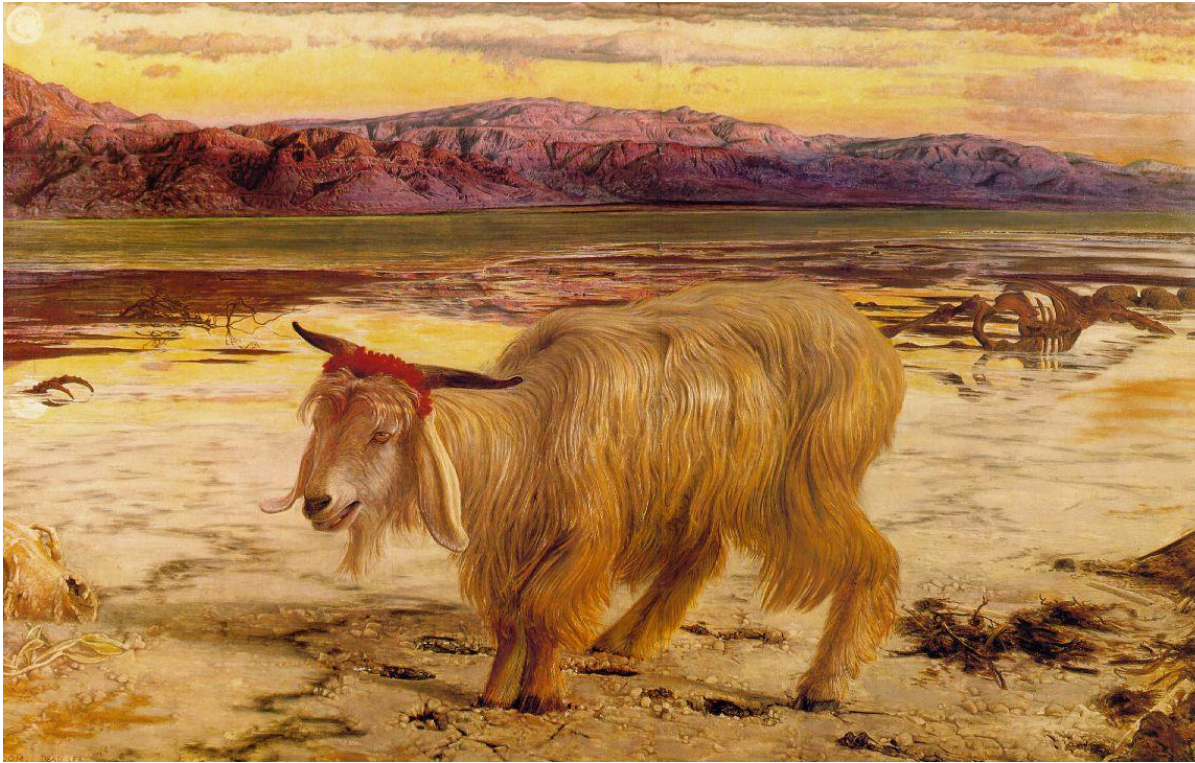
Just as the scapegoat wore the scarlet ribbon around his head as it was driven outside the city, so Origen affirms that this crown of thorns was not taken from the head of the Lord until he had expired upon the cross.¹²³

¹²⁰ [Plautus (254-184 B.C.) *Mostellaria*: *O carnuficium cribum, quod credo fore, ita te forabunt patibulatum per vias stimulis carnufices, si huc reveniat senex*. “Oh, I bet the hangmen will have you looking like a human sieve, the way **they’ll prod you full of holes** as they run you down the streets with your arms on a patibulum, once the old man gets back” (55-57); see also Plutarch *De sera numinis vindicta*. 9 Artemidorus *Oneirocritica* 2.61 Cicero *Pro Rabir.* 9-17, Philo *Sp. Laws* 3.160]

¹²¹ “Every year on the fourteenth of March a man clad in skins was led in procession through the streets of Rome, **beaten with long white rods** [καὶ τοῦτον ἔπαιον ῥάβδοις λευκαῖς ἐπιμήκεσιν, Joannes Lydus *de Mens.* IV.36], and **driven out of the city**” – for the sake of dispelling the malignant elements from his body, and vicariously from the community.” Frazer, *The Golden Bough*. III, 122 ff; cf Usener, *Rh. M.* XXX (1875), 209 ff.,

¹²² m. *Yoma* 6 “He divided the tongue of crimson wool: the half of it he tied to the rock, and the second half between his [the scapegoat’s] horns”

¹²³ “Corona spinea. semel imposita. et nunquam detracta.” — *In Matt*, tr 35. This insignia replaced the *titulus* the convicted would normally wear around their neck as they were paraded through the streets stating the crime they had committed [Dio Cassius 54:3, Suetonius *Caligula* 32, *Domitian* 10, Eusebius *EH* 5.1.44]. Talmudic accounts, Christ’s *titulus* may have been paraded in front of him on a *tropaenum*, by a horseman: “before the execution took place, a **herald went forth** and cried, ‘He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostacy...’ ” [TB *Sanh* 43; cf. the Huldreich *Toledoth Yeshu*]; “one who rode on a horse stood so far distant that he could see the signal of the flag . . . And a herald goes before him, heralding: ‘So and so, the son of so and so, is taken to be stoned, because he committed such and such a crime, and A and B are his witnesses’.” [m.*Sanh* 6.1]



Scarlet-crowned āzaz'ēl in the wilderness.

Finally, the āzaz'ēl goat was bound and led off by a “fit man” [Lev 16:21], while the people acted out its accursed state. The *Epistle of Barnabas* makes this parallel with the *Azazel* ceremony explicit: “Accursed, saith He, *is the one*. Give heed how the type of Jesus is revealed. And do ye all **spit upon** [the scapegoat] and **goad it**” [7:8].

Tertullian confirms:

“But the one of the [goats], begirt with scarlet, amid **cursing** and universal **spitting**, and **tearing**,¹²⁴ and **piercing**, was cast away by the People **outside the city** into perdition” [Adv Jud 14]

¹²⁴ Mishnah *Yoma* 6:4-6 “on account of the Babylonians [Babylonian Jews; according to the Gemara, Alexandrian Jews], who used to pull him [the he-goat] by the hair, saying: ‘Take [the sins] and go, take and go.’”



Estruplund Kirke fresco, c.1542, with visualization of the “Azazel” imagery – the ‘strong man’ [Lev 16:21] leading Christ, bound with the Scarlet cord.

The *Gospel of Peter* records many incidentals of Christ’s procession through Jerusalem that match the *āzaz’el* ritual, and adds:

“And he gave him over to the people before the first day of their feast of the Unleavened Bread. But having taken the Lord, running, they were pushing him and saying, 'Let us **drag**¹²⁵ along the Son of God now that we have power over him.' [3:6]

St. Bonaventure admonishes believer:

"Look, O man, at these dogs **dragging** him along, and the Lamb, like a [sacrificial] victim, meekly following without resistance. One seizes, and other binds him; another drives, another strikes him.”¹²⁶

Gregory Nazianzen wrote:

“When the impious crowd, leaving the city of the Solymi and **dragging** along my Lord with it, came to the Pavement...” (*Christus Patiens* 657)¹²⁷

Melito recognized the sacrificial imagery in the aspect of the procession:

¹²⁵ The “Great Crucifixion Hymn” from Turfan M-5861 r ii.2 has “the Holy [one was] free from sin when He was *dragged and led* before the great governor,” earlier in the narrative.

¹²⁶ “O Charitas ! quam magnum est vinculum tuum, quo Deus ligari potuit !” — *Lign, Vit. de Char.* c. 6

¹²⁷ Cp. “How bitter was the weeping in Jerusalem, when people saw Pilate and his wife with their hands bound with fetters behind their back and **dragged in the streets**, while the Jews were applauding and saying: ‘This is *like the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth!*’” [Coptic/Garshuni *Martyrdom of Pilate*]

“This is the one who was taken from the flock, and was **dragged to sacrifice**, and was killed in the evening, and was buried at night; the one who was not broken while on the tree” [*Peri Pascha* 71].

Again, when Christ prophesied to his disciples that they would have to “take up their crosses” and follow him, the Roman penal system was there to ensure its literal fulfillment:

“When [the governor] heard of Andrew’s arrest, ‘he arrived running and saw the executioners violently **dragging** off the blessed one like a criminal’ [to his crucifixion]” (*Acts of Andrew* ch. 52).¹²⁸

The apocryphal *Acts of John* [from AD 150] reports another level of ritual abuse to which Christ submitted:

“unto the multitude below in Jerusalem I am being crucified and **pierced with lances and reeds.**”¹²⁹

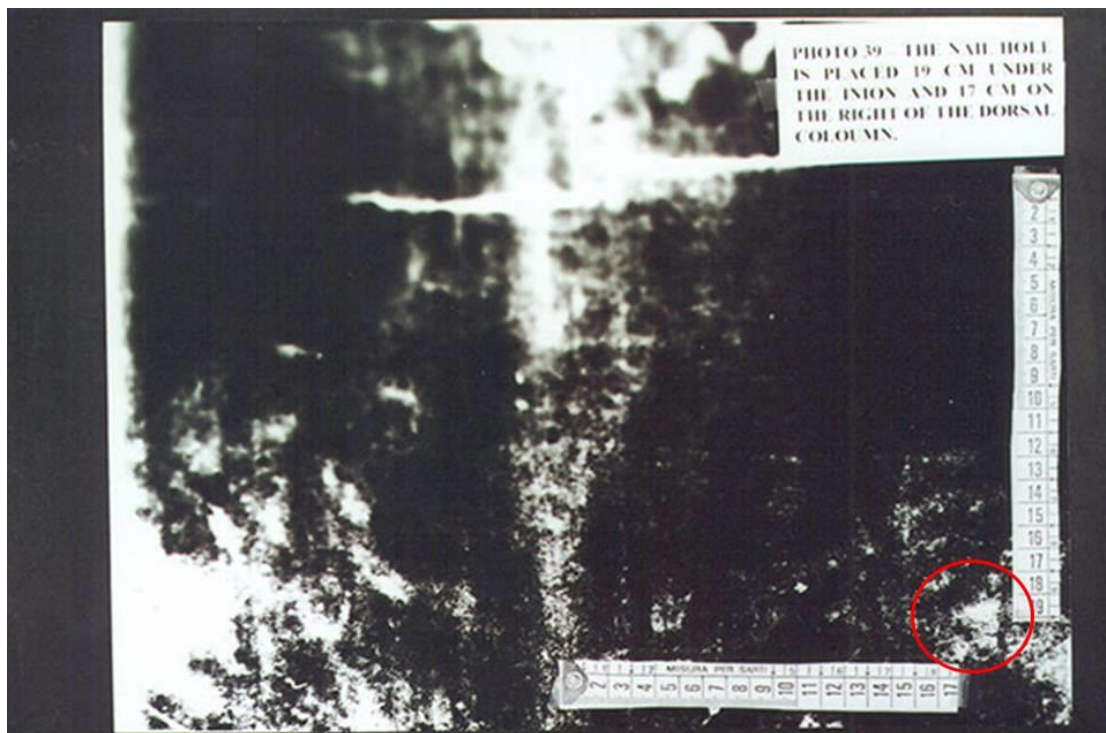
Italian trauma surgeon **Nicolò Cinquemani** has argued that the pathophysiology of Christ’s death stemmed primarily from a puncture wound above his shoulder blade that resulted in a haemothorax.¹³⁰ He found evidence of this particular injury among the wound-marks on the “Shroud of Turin.”¹³¹

¹²⁸ Compare *Acts of Thomas* “And Charis took a wrapper of one of his servants, put it on the neck of the apostle, and said, ‘Drag and take him away; I shall see whether God can save him from my hands.’ And they dragged and took him to King Misdai. . . . And the king ordered his subjects to scourge him one hundred and twenty-eight times and cast him bound into the prison (106) . . . ‘**Drag him along** by force without regard to him, that his impudence may become known to all’.” (138)

¹²⁹ “He was **pierced** by the Jews, and he died and was buried” [Aristides, *Apology* (to Hadrian) 25] “and others did **prick Him** with a **reed**” [*Gosp Peter* 3:9]

¹³⁰ *Le doppie immagini della Sacra Sindone* Anno 2004 Edizioni Kappa Roma

¹³¹ http://www.nicolocinquemani.it/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=86&Itemid=37



From *Le doppie immagini della sacra Sindone e la sua radiazione* by Nicolò Cinquemani

We can read the Mishnah tractate *Yoma* in light of Christ's procession *en route* to the crucifixion. Section 6 describes the *āzaz'ēl* ritual as performed in the time of the Herodian temple, including how the aristocratic Jerusalemites accompanied the goat to the first of the ten stations on scapegoat's journey (almost foreshadowing the "Stations of the Cross" along the *Via Dolorosa*). From that point on, color-signals were used to make it's progress known to Jerusalem and the Temple. When the *Azazel*-goat had reached the final destination, a red ribbon tied to the door of the Temple would miraculously turn white, indicating God's acceptance of the sacrifice (*Yoma* 6 §§ 4-8).

After Christ fulfilled all that the *āzaz'ēl* ritual foreshadowed - yet rejected by the Temple hierarchy - an amazing thing happened:

"Our rabbis taught: During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple, the lot ['For the Lord'] did not come up in the right hand; nor did the crimson colored strap become white" (*Yoma* 39b, i.e. God no longer accepted their ritual offerings).

Another Temple ritual acted-out by Christ and His procession through the *Via Dolorosa*, is referred to by *Hebrews* [13:11-13, alluding to Num 19:9], and expanded upon by the *Epistle of Barnabas*:

“ those men, whose sins are full grown, offer a **[red] heifer** and slaughter and burn it [Num 19], and then that the children¹³² take up the ashes, and cast them into vessels, and twist the scarlet wool on a tree (see here again is the type of the cross and the scarlet wool), and the hyssop [Num 19:6], and... Understand ye how in all plainness it is spoken unto you; **the calf is Jesus**, the men that offer it, being **sinner, are they that brought him unto the slaughter**. After this it is no more men (who offer); the glory is no more for sinners. [8:1-2]

The *Book of Daniel* also references this **Red Heifer** ritual. God tells Daniel in 12:10 that in the last days, "many shall be purified and made white,"¹³³ a reference to the purification ritual of the Red Heifer, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isa 1:18, Num 19:9). Justin Martyr also made this parallel explicit, exegesis from Isaiah 5:18-19,

“Woe unto them that **drag** their iniquity as with a long cord,¹³⁴ and their transgressions as with the harness of [the red] **heifer's** yoke [a type of the Cross]: who say, ‘Let His speed come near; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel come, that we may know it’.”

Both the Red Heifer and the *āzaz'el* goat, were led away on an elevated causeway especially built¹³⁵ for the occasion, even as God had Herod the Great rebuild the prophesied path for the Messiah to traverse. The *terminus* for the Red Heifer causeway was the *miphkad* altar, whereas

¹³² And oxen were brought, and on their backs were laid doors on top of which sat the children with cups of stone in their hands. When they arrived in Shiloah [the children] alighted, and filled [the cups with water], and mounted, and again sat on the doors. (Mishna *Parah* 3:2)

¹³³ Compare Dan 11:35 “And some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end: because it is yet for a time appointed”

¹³⁴ As CLARK notes on this passage: “The victims they offered were splendidly decked out for the sacrifice. Their horns and hoofs were often gilded, and their heads dressed out with fillets and garlands. The cords of vanity may refer to the silken strings by which they were led to the altar, some of which were unusually thick. The offering for iniquity was adorned with fillets and garlands; the sin-offering with silken cords, like unto cart-ropes. Pride, in their acts of humiliation, had the upper hand.”

¹³⁵ m. *Yoma* 6 for the *Azazel*. Many modern scholars assume a large, permanent bridge was built over the Kidron valley for this, but the original texts imply a temporary purpose-built structure: “The term used in the Mishnah [tr. *Parah*] is “*Kevesh*”, which can be understood to be a road. It appears much more likely that a simple road was built to connect the Temple Mount to the Mount of Olives, with the necessary double arches below (which need to be no more than 8 cm high according to Jewish purity laws).” [personal correspondence from Y. Adler; cf. Y. Adler, “The Site of the Burning of the Red Heifer on the Mount of Olives”, *Techumin*, 22 (2002), pp. 537–542. (Hebrew)]

with the *Via Dolorosa*, Christ had to pass through the gate *Miphkad* [Neh 3:31¹³⁶].

It is stated that from the time of Moses until the destruction of the Temple, no more than nine heifers were actually offered (m. *Parah* 3:5), but Josephus records a remarkable story in connection with the last attempt of the priests to perform the heifer ritual:

“they did not attend nor give credit to the signs that were so evident, and did so plainly foretell their future desolation, but, like men infatuated, without either eyes to see or minds to consider, did not regard the denunciations that God made to them. . . . At the same festival also, a heifer, as she was led by the high priest to be sacrificed, gave birth **to a lamb** in the midst of the temple” [*Jewish Wars* 6.5.3].

As difficult as the account may be to believe, the point remains that: this last attempt was deemed ritually defiled and inefficacious, i.e., rejected by God after His Son had fulfilled the propitiation of which the heifer was only a foreshadow [Heb 8:5, 10:1, Col 2:17]. As *Hebrews* pleads with the Jewish believers in Jerusalem:

“if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” [9:13-14]

After Christ passed through the *porta judicialis* (according to traditional accounts of the *Via Dolorosa*), Christ fell¹³⁷ while carrying the cross, and was relieved by Simon of Cyrene. When Christ fell for the last time under the weight of the Cross, it was not merely from physical exhaustion; He was taking on the weight of “the sin of the world” [John 1:29, Isa 53:6]. This was also anticipated prophetically;

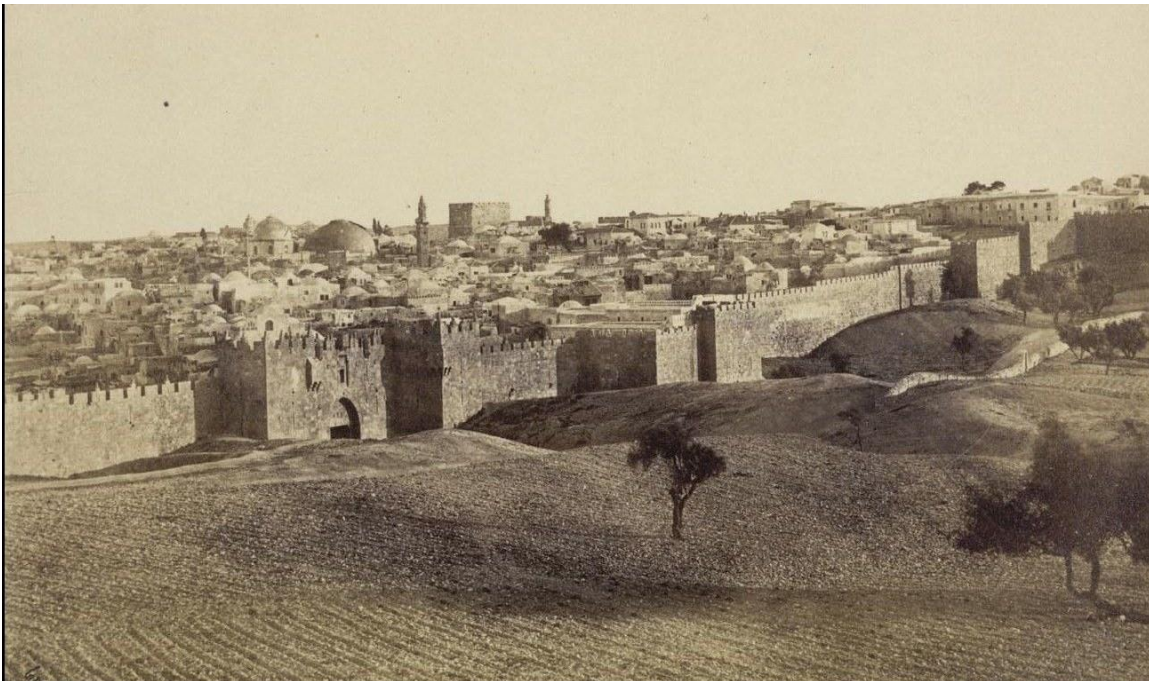
“The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand: they are wreathed, *and* come up upon my neck: He hath made My strength to

¹³⁶ Jerome translated the name as the *porta judicialis*, which, Lightfoot (*Horæ Hebraicæ* ii. 27) suggested, made it associated with the hall of judgment in the Prætorium. Barclay identified the gate *Miphkad* with the “high gate of Benjamin” (Jer 20:2), locating it at the west end of the bridge which crosses the Tyropæon

¹³⁷ Professor Judica-Cordiglia has identified heavy damage to the knees of the man of the Shroud, there being a large contusion to the left knee together with excoriations with jagged edges in the region of the patella or kneecap, and further, smaller contusion wounds to the right knee.

fall, the Lord hath delivered Me into their hands, from whom **I am not able to rise up**” [Lam 1:14]; “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him” [Isa 53:10].

Mark reports: “And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country” [15:21], or “**out of the field.**” This clarifies that he was finishing up his work in the field, heading towards the temple for 9 AM prayers¹³⁸, before the Passover Sabbath. Up until the last century, construction near the northern walls of Jerusalem was prohibited, and the area was kept as cultivated fields, just as they were in Simon’s time:



Jerusalem from the Northwest, view of the Damascus Gate [John Cramb, 1860]

Simon¹³⁹ would have entered the northern gate of Jerusalem, leading to major north-south road through the city [what the Romans would call the *cardo maximus*], and happened upon the crucifixion parade as they intersected this street progressing west [on what the Romans would call the *decumanus*].

¹³⁸ Mark 15:25 “The third hour” (ὥρα τρίτη). This is Jewish time and would be 9 A.M. The trial before Pilate was the sixth hour Roman time, {John 19:14} 6 A.M.; cp Acts 3:1 “Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour” The ninth (τὴν ἐνάτην). There were three hours of prayer (third, sixth, ninth).

¹³⁹ Church tradition tells us that Simon and his two sons [Rufus and Alexander (Mark 15:21)] became believers after this. Rufus [Rom 16:13; Persis [Rom 16:12] is said by the Syriac scholiast to be the wife of Rufus] went on to become bishop of Thebes, [See Hippolytus’ and Dorotheus’ *List of the Sevent*; He is as mentioned by Polycarp (*ad Philipp. chap. ix.1*) an example [of martyrdom?] like Ignatius’; The *Martyrologium Vetus Romanum* {P.L. cxliii. pp. 147, 149, 177, ed. Migne), reads for “XV Kal. Jan. [Dec. 18]: Rufi et Zosimi de primis discipulis Christi, per quos ecclesia de Judæis et Graecis primitiva fundata est”] while Simon and Alexander returned to Africa as evangelists, where they were martyred; the faithful brought their bones back to be buried in the Holy Land. In fact, Simon of Cyrene’s family tomb was discovered just outside of Jerusalem in 1941[Nahman Avigad, “A Depository of Inscribed Ossuaries in the Kidron Valley,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 12 (1962), pp. 1–12]



Typical Roman tetrapylon at intersection of *Cardo* & *Decumanus*

What had Simon been doing in the fields at such a time?

"They bring wood **out of the field** [on a feast-day], either bound together, or from some place fenced round or scattered." [*m.Yom Tov* 4.2]; *Gemara* "They bring wood on a feast day **out of the field**, which is within the limits of the Sabbath, if it be bound together *on the eve of the feast-day*."¹⁴⁰

In Luke 23:26, "And as they led him away" [aphgagon], the connotation is still forensic, the words used especially of those who are led off to trial, prison, or punishment. For the Church Fathers, Christ

"first lifted up the trophy of His Cross, and afterwards handed it to His martyrs to do the like. For it was meet that He should first lift up His own trophy as victor, and that afterwards Christ should bear it in man, and man [then bear it] in Christ" [Ambrose *Comm on Luke* 23].

¹⁴⁰ And Rambam writes, "Rabbi Jose saith, If there be a door in *such a fenced place*, although it be distant from the city almost two thousand cubits, which are the limits of the sabbath, one may bring wood thence." As Lightfoot put it, "It may be conceived, that Simon the Cyrenean came out of the field thus loaded with wood; and you may conceive that he had given occasion to the soldiers or executioners, why they would lay the cross upon him, namely, because they saw that he was a strong bearer; and instead of one burden, they laid this other upon him to bear."



Simon of Cyrene Carrying the Cross [Doors of Santa Sabina, c. AD 400]

“The Lord both bear His own Cross, and again Simon bare it also. He bare it first as a trophy against the devil, and of His own will, for He went without any compulsion to His death. But afterwards the man Simon bare it, to make it known to all that the Lord died not as His own due, but as that of all mankind” [Athanasius, *in loco*].



Relief from Sarcophagus of Domatilla (from Catacomb of Domatilla, now at the Vatican), mid-4th century.
Roman soldier compelling Simon of Cyrene to carry cross through the western gate of Jerusalem

The city thronged, and joined in:

“And there followed him a **great company** of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.” [Luke 23:27]

The “daughters of Jerusalem” [as Christ referred to them, in ironic contrast to the use of the phrase in *Songs of Solomon*] highlighted the drama and pathos of the scene. They “bewailed and lamented” [koptonto kai eyrhoun], functioning as “Greek chorus” - even though according to the rules of the Sanhedrin, “those that are executed by the Sanhedrin Nhyale Nylbatm Nya, they do not mourn for them...”.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ “...but their near relations come and ask the peace of, or salute the witnesses, and they salute the judges, to show, that they have not any thing in their hearts against them, seeing they have passed a true sentence; but though they do not use mourning, lo, they grieve for them; for there is no grief but in the heart” [Maimon. *Hilch. Sanhedrin*, c. 13. sect. 6. cf **Mish. Sanhedrin** 6.4] The loophole was: “all that are put to death by the [Roman] government, although they are executed by the order of the king [e.g., Herod Antipas], and the law gives power to slay them, lo, “they mourn for them”; and they do not restrain any thing from them, and their substance goes to the king, and they are buried in the sepulchres of their fathers.” [Maimon. *Hilch. Ebel*. c. 1. sect. 9].

Jesus “turns around” [Luke 23:28, *strafeiv*] to address the crowd following Him, now that He is no longer encumbered by the cross, and says “stop weeping” (*mh klaiete*). Still acting prophetically in the midst of the spectacle, He “charges” them as the “daughters of Jerusalem,” however to “weep for yourselves, and for your children.” Compare Jer 22:10 –

“Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: *but weep* sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.”

He continues: “For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” [Luke 23:31]. Jesus is alluding to Ezekiel 20:47 –

“Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, and it shall devour every green tree in thee, and every dry tree.”

The words are poetically *apropos*, with multiple levels of irony. At the end of the rainy season, the hills around Jerusalem were indeed green and in full bloom, helping to create a festive atmosphere consistent with the Passover season. Some green trees had been cut down as fresh lumber, for use in the triple crucifixion, and were awaiting Christ and the crowds. **In the Jewish Revolt of AD 70, however, all arbors and orchards surrounding Jerusalem were cut down – as punishment, and fuel – by the Roman legions, during Titus’ long siege of the city.**

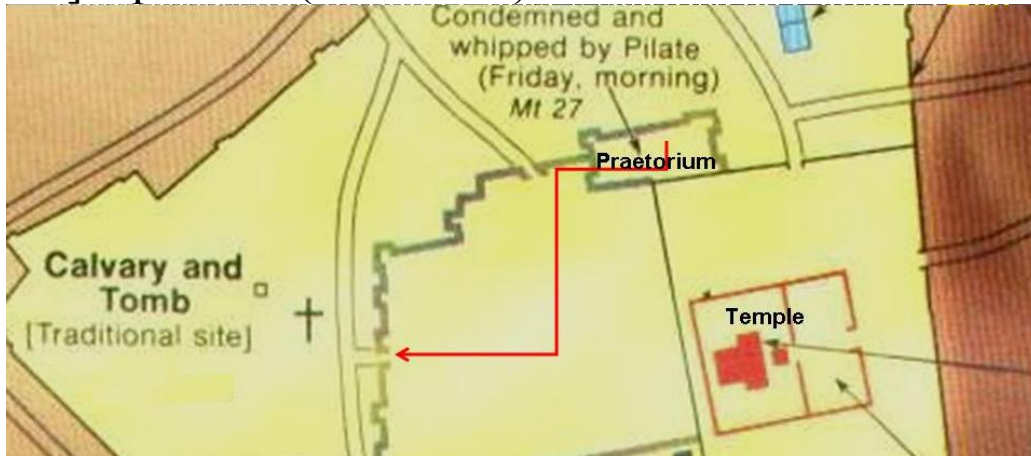
Finally, Christ reached the western gate of the city. To maximize the publicity of the event, the condemned was led outside of a main city gate. This was an important part of the procession in Roman ceremonial justice.¹⁴² **This concept was also integral to Hebrew justice:**

¹⁴² “Take him away this instant to Hippolytus, the blacksmith; bid thick fetters to be rivetted on him. From there let him be led outside the gate to my freedman, Cordalus, at the stone-quarries.” [Plautus (254-184 B.C.) *Mostellaria* scene 5]. Also, Plautus *Miles Gloriosus* 359 “I suspect you will have to die outside the gates, when, with hands outstretched and nailed to the, you will be carrying your cross” *Credo ego istoc extemplo tibi esse eundum actutum extra portam, dispessis manibus, patibulum quom habebis*. Translators of Plautus note that Athens and other Greek cities actually had a ceremonial “gate of Charon” through which malefactors passed to punishment. The Romans had the same custom, with a similar sense of fanfare. As Tacitus remarks, “Publius Marcius, was executed, according to ancient custom, by the consuls outside the Esquiline Gate, after the trumpets had been bidden to sound” [*Annales* 2.32.2]. See also Cicero *Pro. Clu.* 37; Slaves were crucified outside of Rome in a place called *Sessorium*, beyond the Esquiline Gate; their execution was entrusted to the *carnifex servorum* (Tacit. *Ann.* II,32; XV,60; XIV,33; Plut. *Galba* ix; Plaut. *Pseudol.* 13, V, 98). **CARNIFEX**, the public executioner at Rome, who put slaves and foreigners to death (Plaut. *Bacch.* IV.4.47;^o *Capt.* V.4.22), but no citizens, who were punished in a manner different from slaves. It was also his business to administer the torture. This office was considered so disgraceful, that he was not allowed to reside within the city (*Cic. Pro Rabir.* 5), but he lived without the Porta Metia or Esquilina (Plaut. *Pseud.* I.3.98), near the place destined for the punishment of slaves (Plaut. *Cas.* II.6.2; *Tac. Ann.* XV.60; *Hor. Epod.* V.99), called *Sessorium*^o under the emperors (Plut. *Galb.* 28).

“Bring forth him that hath cursed **without the camp**; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, even all the congregation” [Lev 24:1, et al].

We have documentation of this application specifically to Christ’s crucifixion:

“Let us go forth therefore unto Him **without the camp**, bearing [Christ’s] reproach” (Heb 13:13).



Just as Christ had to walk out of the city with His back to the Temple, so the plea of the epistle to the Hebrews is for that community to *literally* and spiritually turn their back on Temple-centered Judaism, pick up their crosses, and follow Jesus out past the gate of physical Jerusalem, and look to Christ’s crucifixion on Calvary as the new focus and locus of worship, looking to the spiritual mount Zion [Heb 12:22] made accessible through Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary [Heb 10:20]. It implies that Christians would make pilgrimages to this site, rather than festival pilgrimages to the Temple.

In summary, Roman Justice had engineered the procession portion of the “spectacle” to be such a searingly shameful parade - for the condemned, their family, and even the community that could give rise to such a criminal –that it would act as a population-wide deterrent. The point was not lost on the followers of Christ.

The apostle Paul picked up on the theatricality of Roman Justice, and this was another way in which the apostles identified with the sufferings of their Messiah [2Cor 1.5, Col 1.24]; as he says in the language of the gladiatorial games:

“God, it seems to me, has exhibited us¹⁴³ apostles last of all,¹⁴⁴ as men condemned to death¹⁴⁵; for we have come to be a **spectacle**¹⁴⁶ to all creation” [1Cor 4:9 (WEY)].

But Christ, at the height of this ignominy, was about to initiate an unprecedented “spectacle” of His own. Christianity was such a threat to Roman paganism precisely because it was able to turn this entire process on its head [Acts 17:6], and reclaim it as a victory parade in the train of Christ:

▣ “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public **spectacle** of them, triumphing over them **by** the cross.” [Col 2:15 NIV]; “Wherefore he saith, ‘When He ascended up on high, **He led** captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men’.” [Eph 4:8]

It is for this very reason that “when He had called the people unto Him with His disciples also, He said unto them, ‘Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me’” [Mark 8:34], that it might be said of them

“These follow the Lamb *whithersoever He goeth*. These were purchased from among men, the firstfruits to God and to the Lamb” [Rev 14:4].

¹⁴³ apedeixen a technical word here, like the Latin ‘edere’ (Suet. *Aug.* 45 ‘edere gladiatores,’ Livy 28.21 ‘munus gladiatorium’).

¹⁴⁴ Refer to the custom of bringing forth those in the amphitheatre, at the *conclusion* of the spectacles, who were to fight with other men to the death, and who had no chance of escape [Seneca *Epis* 7].

¹⁴⁵ epiyanatiouv ‘condemned criminals.’ In this sense Dionysius of Halicarnassus, speaking of the Tarpeian Rock, says (A. R. 7.35) oyen autoiv eyov ballein touv epiyanatiouv. The LXX (*Bel and the Dragon* 31) has it for those thrown daily to the lions. The gladiators would say *morituri salutamus*: “We who are about to die salute you”

¹⁴⁶ yeatron The Greek word may mean (1) the place, (2) the spectators, (3) the actors in the spectacle, or (4) the spectacle itself. The last meaning is the one used here and is the rarest (Hesych. yeatron yeama h sunagma)

Chapter 3

Our historical journey down the *Via Dolorosa* with Christ ends at Golgotha, a prophetic as well as strategic locale. Pilate used the area of Golgotha for crucifixions because its features accorded with Roman Justice. As Quintillian¹⁴⁷ wrote:

"Whenever we crucify the guilty, the most **crowded roads** are chosen, where most people can **see** and be moved by this fear. For penalties relate not so much to retribution as to their exemplary effect." [*Declamations* 274]

Luke's subtle play on words in Luke 23:48 ["And all the people that came together to that sight (την θεωριαν), beholding –(θεωρουντες – spectating) "] establishes that the site was used as a "spectacle" - την θεωριαν – the same root from which derived the word "theater." The connotation of a contrived, theatrical event, staged for the benefit of the populace is correct. The book of *Revelation* alludes to it in this way:

"And their dead bodies [shall lie] in the street of the great city [επι την πλατειαν πολεων].... where also our Lord was **crucified**." [Rev 11.8]

The Greek phrase can be rendered more idiomatically as "**upon the city plaza**" – πλατειαν having the connotation of a "broadway" or a widened area of a main thoroughfare, designed for public gatherings. The translators of the Septuagint version used it in such contexts, as in 2Chron 32.6, et al. Here, *Revelation* implies, the **two witnesses** [μαρτυσιν - martyrs¹⁴⁸] will be killed in the same manner, and on the same **city plaza** where Christ was crucified.

Melito, bishop of Sardis in the 2nd century, probably had the imagery of *Revelation* in mind when he visited the city. He even wrote a commentary on the book [Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* IV, xiii, xxvi]. He must have been impressed by the place the local Christians [with their church on the new

¹⁴⁷ Roman rhetorician of Hispania, c. AD 35-95; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quintilian>

¹⁴⁸ Even for Christians martyrs today, this is not symbolic or metaphorical, but a literal possibility; according to the 50th Session of the *UN Commission on Human Rights* (1994), local Sudanese bishops reported several cases of crucifixion of Christian priests. Sudan's Penal Code, based upon the government's interpretation of *Shari'a*, provides for execution by crucifixion.

“Mt. Sion” pointing towards the Holy Sepulchre itself¹⁴⁹] showed him as the site where Christ was crucified.



Hadrianic Temple to Venus on Golgotha [by Tissot], looking East toward Mt of Olives on the horizon. By then, however, it was no longer Jerusalem, but paganized *Aelia Capitolina*.¹⁵⁰ At that point, a *Temple of Venus*, with her statue on the outcropping of **Golgotha** itself,¹⁵¹ overlooked a grand Roman forum, with its own monumental arched gateway leading to the *cardo maximus*, the main thoroughfare of the new city. Emperor Hadrian, intending to wipe out every trace of the old city, had unwittingly managed to maintain the same theatrical environment of the original site of the crucifixion, complete with the plaza on the roadway.

Later, around AD 165, Melito gave a paschal homily in which he emphasized multiple times the fact that Christ had been crucified on the “plaza” [πλατειαν]. Melito probably knew Ignatius of Antioch [martyred in AD 107], a disciple of the apostle John himself.¹⁵² Writing before Hadrian’s rebuilding of the city, Ignatius also recognized this aspect of Christ’s crucifixion. He referred to the Cross as the *mechane*, a technical term for “theatre-machine,” by which believers are drawn to heaven.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ See B. Pixner “Church of the Apostles Found on Mt. Zion.” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16.3 (May/June 1990):16-35, 60.

¹⁵⁰ In an attempt to obliterate any memory and association of Jews with the land, emperor Hadrian renamed it *Palestine* [“land of the Philistines,” as opposed to *Judaea*, “land of the Jews”], and renamed Jerusalem *Aelia Capitolina*, after his family [the *Aelia* clan] and the *Capitoline* gods of Rome, to whom he dedicated his victory after the Second Jewish Revolt of AD 135-138.

¹⁵¹ Jerome reports that a statue of Jupiter stood on the *anastasis* (or grave) and a marble statue to Venus on the place of the crucifixion (Epist. 58 *To Paulinus*, 3).

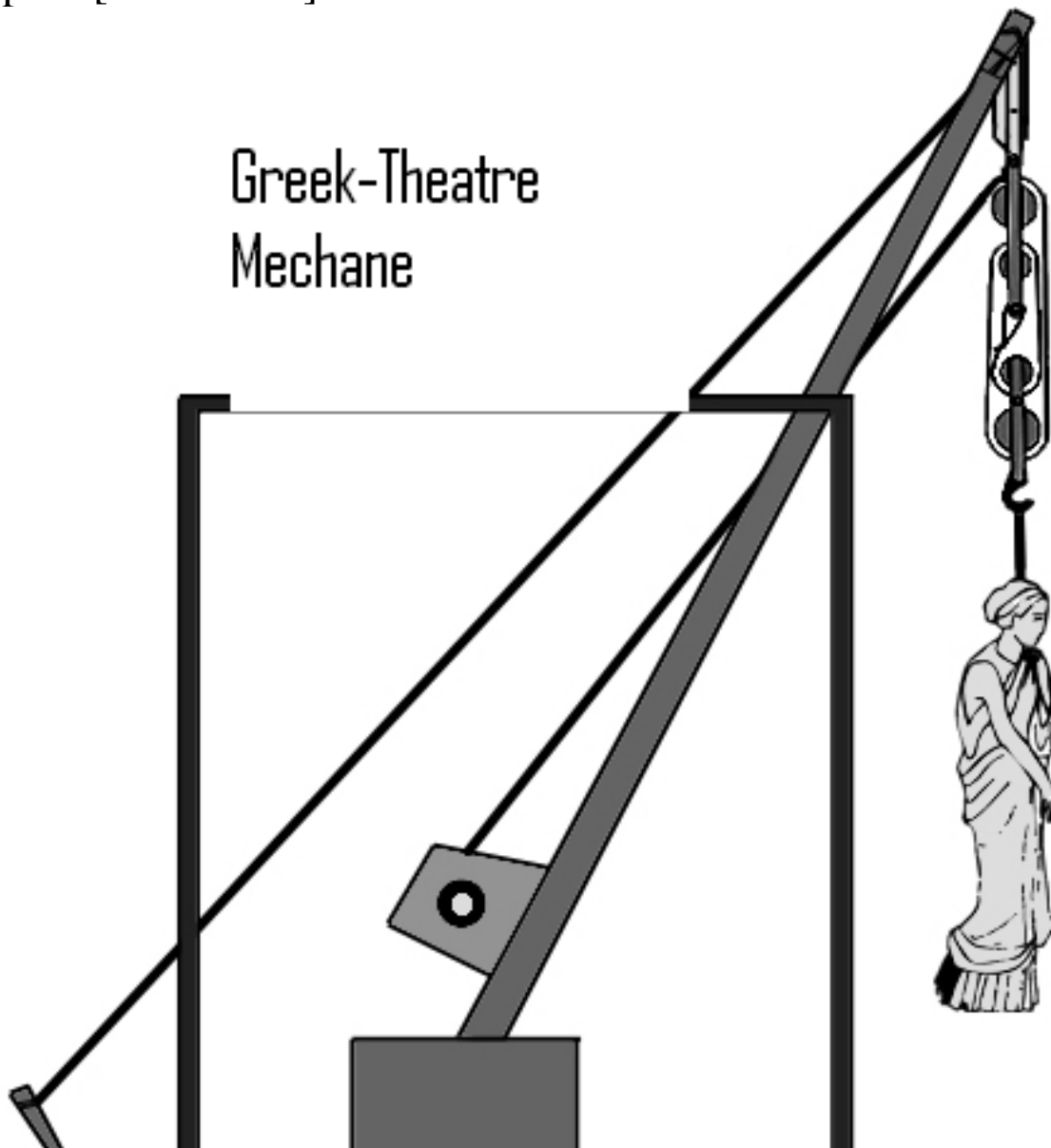
¹⁵² “Melito, with Claudius Apollinaris and even Polycrates, may have been personally acquainted with Ignatius” [*Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Scribner’s Sons, 1886) vol. VIII, p.750, referring to Lightfoot *A.F.* v.2.1 p.468]

¹⁵³ *Letter to the Ephesians* IX, I. ἀναφερόμενοι εἰς τὰ ὕψη διὰ τῆς μηχανῆς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὃς ἐστὶν σταυρός.

As a witness of many crucifixions, Ignatius was drawing a spiritual analogy from a real-life visual parallel:

- ▣ “being raised to the heights by the *theatre- machine* [μηχανῆς] of Jesus Christ, which is the **Cross**, using as your **rope** the Holy Spirit”
[*ad Ephes.* 9.1]

Such *mechane* were used in the Graeco-Roman world to heighten the impact of public events,¹⁵⁴ as in the funeral of Julius Caesar as reported by Appian [*B.C.* 2.147].¹⁵⁵



¹⁵⁴ E.g., Plato *Crat.* 425d; *Clit.* 407a

¹⁵⁵ “While they were in this temper, and were already nigh to violence, someone raised above the bier an image of Caesar himself, wrought of wax. As for the actual body, since it lay on its back upon the couch, it could not be seen. The image was turned around and around by a mechanical device [μηχανῆς], showing the twenty-three wounds on all parts of the body and the face---which gave him a shocking appearance. The people could no longer bear the pitiful sight presented to them. They groaned, and girding themselves, they burned the Senate chamber, where Caesar had been slain, and ran hither and thither searching for the murderers, who had fled some time previously”

Suetonius (*vita Jul.* 84) refers to this *mechane* used at Caesar's funeral¹⁵⁶ as a *tropaeum*¹⁵⁷ (from whence we derive the English "trophy"). **Eusebius uses the same descriptive term for the Cross as applied by Suetonius to Caesar's funerary spectacle:**

▣ "For He was not destroyed by disease, nor by the cord, nor by fire, nor even on the trophy [το τροπαιον] of the Cross were His legs cut with steel like those of the others who were evil-doers; neither, in a word, did He reach His end by suffering from any man any of the usual forms of violence which destroy life. But as if He were only handing His life over willingly to those who plotted against His body, as soon as He was raised from the earth, He gave a cry upon the tree, and commended His Spirit to His Father" [*Proof of the Gospels* 3.4].

As alluded to by Eusebius, even the ceremonial aspect of "raising up the cross"¹⁵⁸ during the crucifixion spectacle was seen as profoundly symbolic to Christians in light of OT foreshadowing. **As Christ Himself prophesied:**

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be **lifted up**" (John 3:14); "And, if I be **lifted up** from the earth, I will draw all *men* unto me." (John 12:32¹⁵⁹)

¹⁵⁶ "When the funeral was announced, a pyre was erected in the Campus Martius near the tomb of Julia, and on the rostra a gilded tabernacle was placed, made after the model [*simulacrum*] of the temple of Venus Genetrix; within was a couch of ivory with coverlets of purple and gold, At the head was a trophy [*tropaeum*], with the [bloodstained] robe in which he was slain"

¹⁵⁷ τροπαιον (Latin *tropaeum*.) is an ancient Greek and later Roman monument set up to commemorate a victory over one's foes. Typically this takes the shape of a tree (or, in later times, a pair of stakes set crosswise) upon which is hung the armaments captured from a defeated and dead foe. The *tropaion* is then dedicated to a god in thanksgiving for the victory. The *tropaeum* in Rome, on the other hand, would probably *not* be set up on the battle-site itself, but rather displayed prominently in the city of Rome

¹⁵⁸ S. Ambrose (*in Luke* xxiii.), "He first lifted up **the trophy of His Cross**, and afterwards handed it to His martyrs to do the like. For it was meet that He should first lift up His own trophy as victor, and that afterwards Christ should bear it in man, and man in Christ" & [pseudo-] Athanasius, "The Lord both bear His own Cross, and again Simon bare it also. He bare it first as a **trophy** against the devil, and of His own will, for He went without any compulsion to His death. But afterwards the man Simon bare it, to make it known to all that the Lord died not as His own due, but as that of all mankind."

¹⁵⁹ cp. John 3:14, 8:28, 12:32-34, Melito *Peri Pascha* 95, Lact *Div Inst* 4.18, etc

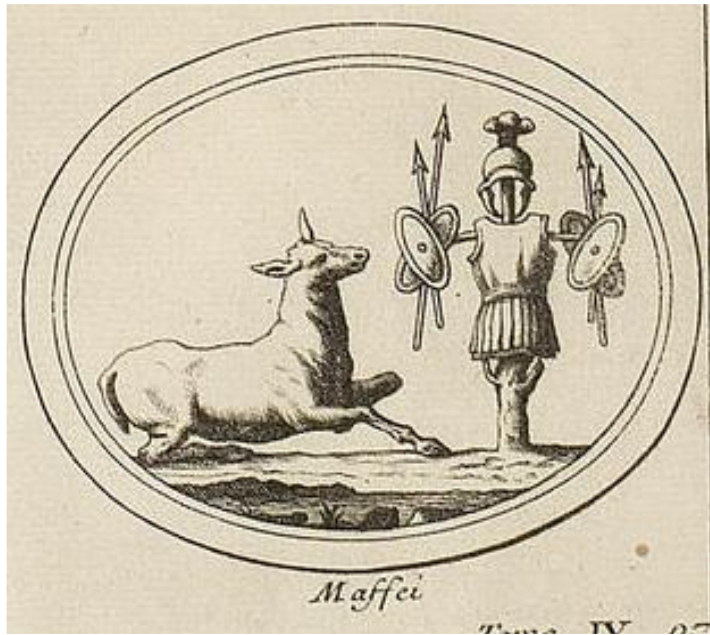


Tissot's *Raising the Cross*

As described by Alexander of Alexandria,¹⁶⁰

“when our Lord was suffering upon the cross, the tombs burst open, the infernal region was disclosed, the souls leapt forth, the dead returned to life, and many of them were seen in Jerusalem, whilst the mystery of the cross was being perfected; what time our Lord trampled upon death, dissolved the enmity, bound the strong man, and **raised the *trophy* of the cross**, His body being **lifted up upon it**, that the body might appear on high, and death to be depressed under the foot of flesh” [*On the Passion* § 6].

¹⁶⁰(died April 17, 326); http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Alexander_of_Alexandria

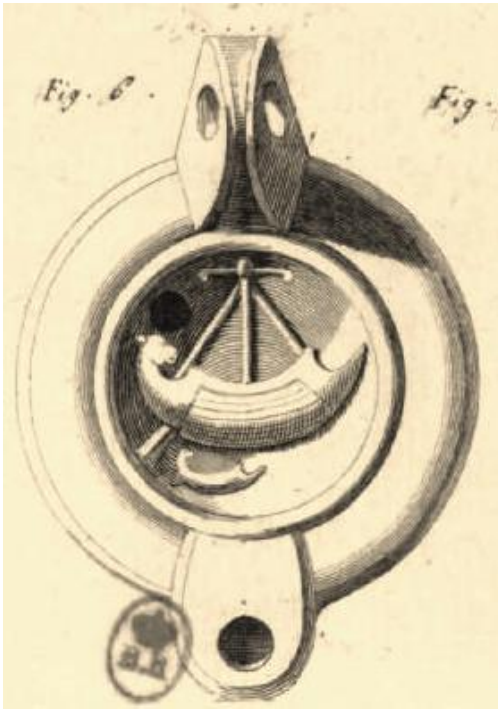


Engraved gem & medallion depictions of Crucifix-like Roman *Tropaea* used in Triumphal Processions

The Artemidorus compared the Roman crucifixion procedure of lifting up the cross with the lifting of a sail up to the mast of a ship. (*Oneirocritica* 2:53; 4:49)¹⁶¹ This parallel was not lost on Christian observers. Justin Martyr [writing c. AD 151] noted on the symbolism of the Cross:

“the sea is not traversed except that *trophy* which is called a **sail** abide safe in the ship; and the earth is not ploughed without it: diggers and mechanics do not their work, except with tools which have this shape” [*Apology* 1.55].

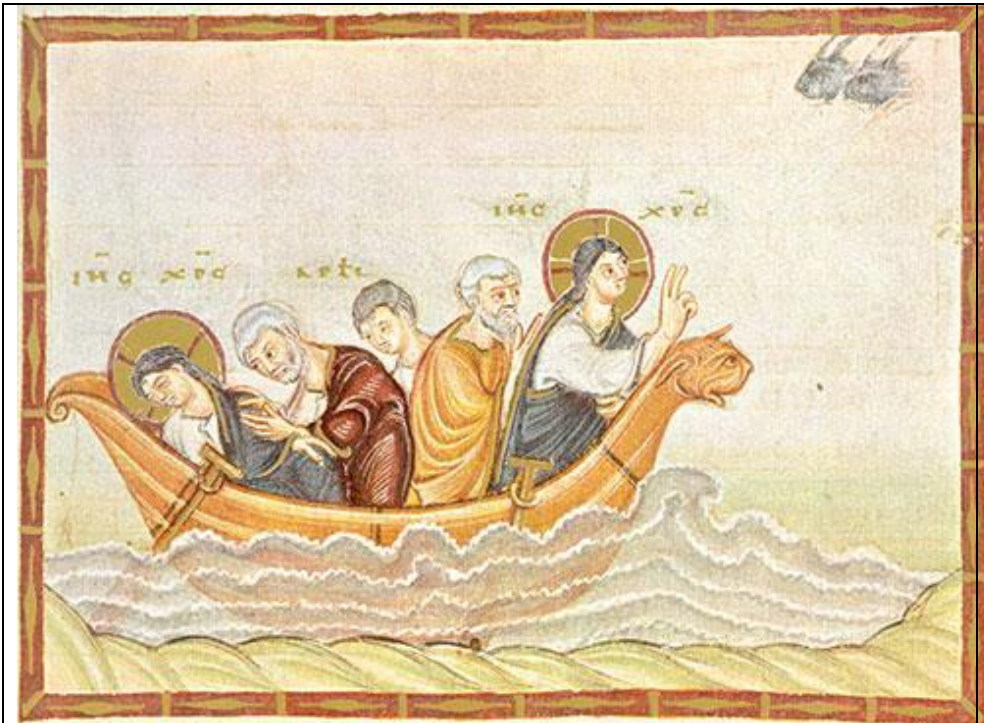
¹⁶¹“For **the cross** (*ho stauros*) is like death and the man who is to be nailed, *carries it beforehand* (*proteron bastazei*)” (*Artemidorus Daldianus, Oneirocritica* 2.56; written in the second century AD. “**Being crucified** (*staurousthai*) is auspicious for all seafarers. For **the cross** (*ho stauros*), like a ship, is made of wood and nails, and **the ship's mast resembles a cross** (*hé katarthios autou homoia esti stauró*)” (*Artemidorus Daldianus, Oneirocritica* 2.53). MEGGIT, J.J., “Artemidorus and the Johannine Crucifixion”, *JHighCrit* 5 (1998) 203-208. The article compares the use of ὕψος in Jn 3:14; 8:28; 12:32.34, in which the cross is transformed in an instrument of exaltation, and ὑψηλός in some passages of Artemidorus’ *Oneirocritica* (2:53; 4:49). The idea of elevation in this sense could be familiar not only in the Hebrew language, but also to the Mediterranean world in general.



Oil-lamp from Herculaneum [before AD 79] depicting the “ship of salvation” with Cross-shaped mast

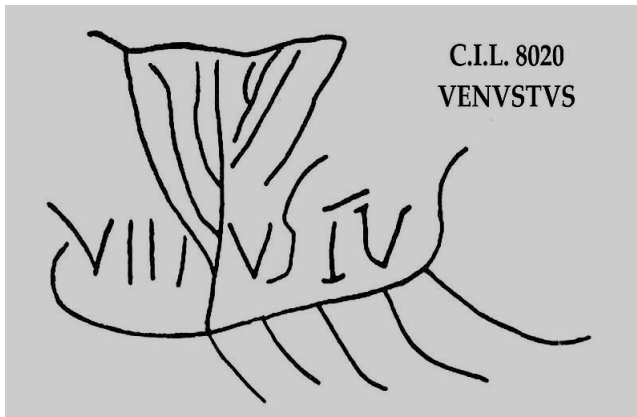


Early Christian Intaglio with same theme¹⁶²



Depiction of Christ on Boat [similar to ones in more ancient versions, above], *Codex Egberti*

¹⁶² Clement of Alexandria: “The Word, then, permits them a finger-ring of gold [Jas 2:2]... And let our seals be either a dove, or a **fish**, or a **ship** scudding before the wind, or a musical lyre, which Polycrates used, or a ship’s anchor, which Seleucus got engraved as a device; and if there be one fishing, he will remember the apostle” [Paedagogus 3.11]



Pompeian graffito [before AD 79] depicting the “ship of salvation” for Venustus, with the T-Cross as its mast [left]



Early Christian Intaglio with same theme [above]

There were many (and intentional), parallels between a crucifixion site, and the backdrop for a stage production. This is seen in one of the earliest Christian depictions of the Crucifixion on the church door panels of Santa Sabina, c. 400. Classicist N. Stavriniades suggests the depiction is that of an actual stage production outside the city walls shown in the background.¹⁶³



Depiction of the Crucifixion, door panels of St Sabina in c. 400

Executions could even take the form of the re-creation of some tragic scene from history or mythology with the criminal cast in the role of the

¹⁶³ Author Jay Raskin supports this, noting that the narrative jumps in the gospel passion scenes make for poor literature but are squarely in the realm of Roman mime theater, which specialized in short scenes of gory violence, irony, satire and sarcasm [Two chapters of Ray's book, *The Evolution of Christs And Christianities* (2006, ISBN-13: 978-1413497915), deal with this topic.].

victim killed by wild beasts.¹⁶⁴ The theatrical element of this violent scene is also evident in the 1st century graffito in the *Domus Tiberiana*, depicting preparations for a crucifixion.¹⁶⁵



On this location, the stage-like gallows were annually erected, against the backdrop of the city walls of Jerusalem [John 19:20 “nigh to the city”],¹⁶⁶ just outside the main western gate [Heb 13:12], leading to the main east-west thoroughfare [Mt 27:39]. This painful familiarity with the spectacle of Roman crucifixion in the culture explains why the Gospel accounts are

¹⁶⁴ Martial records one such execution, a version of the mime *Laureolus* by Catullus, in which a notorious bandit was executed by crucifixion: *On the Public Shows of Domitian* (1897) VII. ON LAUREOLUS: “As first, bound down upon the Scythian rock, Prometheus with ever-renewed vitals feasted the untiring vulture, so has Laureolus, suspended on no feigned cross, offered his defenceless entrails to a Caledonian bear. His mangled limbs quivered, every part dripping with gore, and in his whole body no shape was to be round. In short, he suffered such punishment as one who had been guilty of parricide, or who had cut his master's throat, or had insanely despoiled the temples of their hidden gold [It was a common practice for the ancients to deposit their private property in the temples for greater security], or had applied the incendiary torch to thee, O Rome. This criminal had surpassed the crimes of ancient story, and what had been fabulous, was in his case a real punishment” Domitian has the honour of introducing a real death—that of an unfortunate wretch already condemned “for the amusement of this detestable people.”—See Gifford and Mayor on *Juvenal* viii. 187 ; and for a curious comment, compare what Martial says of the tigress in *Ep.* 18.6: “Postquam inter nos est, plus feritatis habet!”

¹⁶⁵ F.X.Krause *Verhandlungen der Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte*. Jahrgang 1898. p. 138ff; *The Antiquary* March 1898 [vol 34, p. 65, 148f] HP FITZ-GERALD MARRIOTT; Marucchi, *Di alcuni graffiti del Palatino* (1898); cf. *Forum Romain et Palatin*, 1903, 378-380; BC 1895, 195-196; AL 954. G. Cozza-Luzi and O. Marucchi, *Di alcuni graffiti del Palatino nella casa di Tiberio presso il Clivus Victoriae*. Rome, 1898. 8 pp; *The San Francisco Call*, March 20, 1898, Sunday edition, Page 18

¹⁶⁶ Josephus: “so they were first whipped, and then tormented with all sorts of tortures, before they died, and were then crucified before the wall of the city” [BJ 5.11.1]

so remarkably laconic about the process itself – the horrific details did not need to be rehearsed.

Even though crucifixion was a particularly Roman affair, this particular event was sanctioned by the Temple hierarchy, and obligated the attendance of all Jerusalem. As Melito affirmed,

▣ “in the middle of the **main** street, even in the center of the city, while *all* were looking on, that the unjust murder of this just person took place” [*Peri Pascha* 94].

Chrysostom’s¹⁶⁷ preaching and teaching drew attention to this very point: “For the passion indeed all the world knew: for He had been hanged **on high**, upon the frame of wood and in **mid-day**, and in a **chief city**, and at a **principal feast**, when it was **least permitted that any should be absent.**” [Hom. 5 *on 1 Cor*]

As Chrysostom suggests, we need to envision “Golgotha Plaza” as the widened area of a main thoroughfare, designed for public gatherings:

▣ “Therefore they both crucified Him publicly, that they might make a show of it **in the sight of all**; and therefore also they did it by the hands of the soldiers, that these things being perpetrated even by a **public** tribunal, the insult might be the greater.” [Hom. 87 *on Matt*]

¹⁶⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Chrysostom



“Golgotha Plaza” as depicted by Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506) – Church of San Zeno Altarpiece (Central Predella)

We can see the spectacle in all its violence, for what it is: “Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion” [Ps 22:12-13]. Or as Cyril of Alexandria¹⁶⁸ more literally described it:

“Him Who was bearing scorn and suffering, you expect to come in godlike glory: you see Him surrounded by a multitude of the Jews, and the wicked gang of the Pharisees, and Pilate's band of soldiers---- all these were mocking Him, and no single one of them confessed...” [on Luke Hom. 147]

Epiphanius writes,

“Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified at Golgotha... There is nothing to be seen in the place resembling this name; for it is not situated upon a height¹⁶⁹ that it should be called ‘of a Skull’.... In this place our Lord Jesus Christ was **lifted up** on the Cross.” [*Panarion* 46.5]

¹⁶⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyril_of_Alexandria

¹⁶⁹ The diminutive *monticulus* (little mount) was coupled with the name A.D. 333 by the "Pilgrim of Bordeaux" after St Helena began cutting down the bedrock around it. The place is described as a "knoll of scanty size" (*deficiens loci tumor* -- Eucherius, 427-440), apparently natural, about fifteen paces from where he was interred.

Gregory Nazianzen¹⁷⁰ described the scene thus:

“When the impious crowd, leaving the city of the Solymi¹⁷¹...came to **the Pavement** ...they had thus hung up the Lord” (*Christus Patiens* 657-666).¹⁷²

“Golgotha Plaza” was not only paved, but its name suggests that it functioned as the public polling-station [lit. “heads” counted] at Jerusalem:

“Now the Levites were numbered from the age of thirty years and upward: and their number by their polls [תלגלג *gulgoleth*] man by man, was thirty and eight thousand” [1Chr 23:3].

“These *were* the sons of Levi after the house of their fathers; *even* the chief of the fathers, as they were counted by number of names by their polls [תלגלג *gulgoleth*], that did the work for the service of the house of the LORD, from the age of twenty years and upward” [1Chr 23:24].

Crucifixion in just such a place fulfilled yet another prophecy of Messiahship:

▣ “Therefore will I divide him *a portion* with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was **numbered** with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” [Isa 53:12]

Like the crucifixion site outside the *Campus Esquilinus* in Rome itself, near Golgotha, there were lavish tombs and gardens¹⁷³ [John 19:41]. In fact, the ground west of the city was covered with gardens (Josephus *BJ* VI, ii, 2; vii, 2) and this is why the western gate bore the name of *Gennath*, “Gate of the Gardens.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ 4th-century [Archbishop of Constantinople](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregory_of_Nazianzus) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregory_of_Nazianzus; this authorship is sometimes contested, and attributed to Apollinaris the Elder, also from the 4th century

¹⁷¹ A poetic name for Jerusalem

¹⁷² This description also occurs in the ancient apocryphon *Gospel of Nicodemus*, [Part I, Second Greek Form] 10: “Now the Jews and the Roman soldiers, leading Jesus, with those that followed, got safe to the place called *Cranium*, which was **paved with stone**.” Cf “Lithostraton, that is, the place strewn over with stones, is the place of Calvary, whose summit the blood of the Saviour Jesus, God and man, being poured out, sprinkled.” Macarius Chrysocephalus Philadelphiensis Metropolitae, *oratio in exaltationem venerandae et vivificae crucis* PG 150, col 0167 [apud Gretser, *de St. Cruce*. Ratisbon, 1734. Tom. II p. 156]; Coptic/Garshuni *Martyrdom of Pilate*: “When our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified in the place called **Kranion** - which being interpreted means a **row of stones**” *BULLETIN OF THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY*, Volume 12, 1928, Page 492

¹⁷³ Most notably, the **Gardens of Maecenas** [see [Fronto, ad M. Caesarem 2.2](#)]

¹⁷⁴ In *Ma'aserot* 2. § 5, there is mention of a *Ginnath Veradim* גנת ורדימם "rose garden" in Jerusalem, which was situated to the west from the temple mount, according to the *Tosephoth Yom Toba* on the passage; and it is probable enough that this *Ginnath*, garden, is identical with the *Gennath* of Josephus.

As soon as the condemned reached the crucifixion site it was customary to offer a pain-numbing sedative, to ensure the victim did not expire too quickly. What Matthew refers to as “vinegar to drink mingled with gall” [27:34] and Mark as “wine mingled with myrrh” [15:23], both different ways of referring to *medicatum vinum*, in accordance with Talmudic tradition.¹⁷⁵

This custom gave rise to the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy in the Psalms. **Two** cups were given to our Lord; one before he was nailed to the cross: of “wine mingled with myrrh,” and another of vinegar, while he hung on the cross. The “drink mingled with gall” fulfilled the **first** part of Psalm 69:21 - “They gave¹⁷⁶ me also gall for my meat” It was this pain-numbing elixir that Christ refused, so that He might bear the full brunt of humanity’s sorrow [Isa 53:3].

Next, Christ was stripped: “Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, **took his garments**, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also *his* coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout” [John 19:23]. David’s prophetic psalm uncannily anticipates the historical reality of Roman procedure in these situations: “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture” [Psalm 22:18¹⁷⁷].

Unlike Jewish custom,¹⁷⁸ in the Roman spectacle, possessions of the crucified were publicly divided among the executioners, including the clothes, [e.g. Diodorus Siculus 33.15.1¹⁷⁹]. Thus bereft of his garments, he was crucified naked, according to the custom of the Romans¹⁸⁰:

¹⁷⁵ “a man went out to be executed, to give him to drink a grain of frankincense in a cup of wine, that his understanding might be disturbed, as it is said, [Prov 31:6] ‘Give strong drink to him that is ready to perish, and wine to those that be of heavy hearts’; and the tradition is, that the honourable women in Jerusalem [cp. Luke 23:28] gave this freely; but if they did not, it was provided at the charge of the congregation.” [TB *Avoda Zara*, fol. 12.2]. See also T. Bab. *Sanhedrin*, fol. 43. 1. *Bemidbar Rabba*, sect. 10. fol. 193. 4. Maimon. *Hilch. Sanhedrin*, c. 13. sect. 2, 3. Moses Kotsensis *Mitzvot Tora*, pr. affirm. 98. “he that goes to be executed they mix for him, Nyy lv owkb hnwbl lv jrwq, “a grain of frankincense in a cup of wine,” that his mind may be disturbed, or not sensible; as it is said, Pr 31:6, “give strong drink to him that is ready to perish, and wine to the bitter in soul”

¹⁷⁶ ὠντην:ω and εδοκᾶν in LXX both have a range of meaning including “set before” or “offer” as well as simply “give”

¹⁷⁷ *Iren Demo Apost* 80. “And again David says: *They looked upon me, they parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture they cast lots*. For at His crucifixion the soldiers parted His garments **as they were accustomed**. And the garments they parted by tearing; but for the vesture, because it was woven from the top and was not sewn, they cast lots, that to whomsoever it should fall he should take it”

¹⁷⁸ See Tosefta *Sanh* 4.6, T.B. *Sanh* 27b, 48b [Possessions given to next of kin]

¹⁷⁹ S. Cyril observes on this, “They claim the garments as being theirs by the law of inheritance, as the reward for their services” S. Chrysostom says also, “This was generally done in the case of mean and utterly destitute criminals.”

¹⁸⁰ Pliny *Nat Hist* 26.4, Lucan 6.543, Artemidorus *Oneirocritica* 2.6

“having stretched out both hands and fastened them to a piece of wood which extended across his chest and shoulders as far as his wrists, followed him, tearing his **naked body** with whips" (Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities*, 7.69.1-2).

As Ambrose¹⁸¹ says,

"Naked He ascends the Cross. I behold Him naked But He who laid aside His garments, and went up on the Cross just as nature had made Him, was a conqueror." [*in Luke xxiii*]

This shameful nakedness was approved as a deterrent in Jewish jurisprudence: “When he came to four ells from the place of execution, he was stripped of his garments. . . . The sages, however, say: ‘A male was [executed] while **naked**’”.... “Only a blasphemer and an idolater are hanged (but no others). A male is hanged **with his face toward the people**” [m. *Sanh* 6.3,5]. Melito of Sardis:

“O frightful murder! O unheard of injustice! The Lord is disfigured and he is not deemed worthy of a cloak for his **naked body**, so that he might not be seen exposed. For this reason the stars turned and fled, and the day grew quite dark, in order to hide the **naked** person hanging on the tree, darkening not the body of the Lord, but the eyes of men” [*Peri Pascha* 97].

John Chrysostom: “remember that nakedness wherewith I was **naked on the Cross** for thee” [Homily XV on *Rom.* viii.28].¹⁸²

As Christ mounted the Cross, another foreshadowing [Col 2:17] became a fulfilled. As we’ve seen in Jewish tradition, Isaac is seen as a type of the “suffering Servant”¹⁸³ – but the connection with Christ goes even deeper. Scholar Mark Bregman has pointed out that Jewish art often portrayed “the ram in the thicket” as **hanging** on the tree.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹Bishop of Milan [born c. 337 – d. 4 April 397; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambrose>]

¹⁸²Christ is depicted with historically accurate nakedness in the *graffito blasphemum*, and four Roman-era engraved gems [see below]

¹⁸³Christians also saw the sacrifice of Isaac as prefiguring Christ: *Barnabas* 7:3; Melito *Peri Pascha* 57; Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 180), *Adversus Haereses* Book IV, Chapter 5, Paragraph 4; Hippolytus of Rome says *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 2:15; Origen *Homilies on Genesis* 8:6; Cyril of Alexandria *Paschal Homilies; Glaph in Gen* [PG 69:141D]

¹⁸⁴M. Bregman, "The Depiction of the Ram in the Aqedah Mosaic at Beit Alpha (Hebrew)," *Tarbiz* 51 (1982) 306-309.



Regensburg Pentateuch (c. 1300, Cod. 180/52, fol. 18v.): The Binding of Isaac

The question is why the lamb was portrayed in this unusual position, which does not seem to be dictated by the biblical description of the lamb. Bregman suggests that this description was influenced by *Christian* art, which illustrates the patristic typology of the *Akedah*¹⁸⁵ as prefiguring of the crucifixion of Christ.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akedah>

¹⁸⁶ There are well over a thousand representations of the *Akedah* in early Christian art; Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335 - ca. 394 CE) wrote in his book *On the Son of God and the Holy Spirit* (*Patrologiae Graecae* 46.573) that "I have seen many times the likeness of this suffering in painting and not without tears have I come upon this sight, when art clearly led the story before the sight."



The Sacrifice Of Isaac Doors Of Saint Zeno, Verona, Italy 1100 Master of Saint Zeno II
(12th C.) Bronze Relief San Zeno Maggiore, Verona, Italy

In later Jewish thought, Isaac became a type of the “lamb led to the slaughter” [Isa 53:7]. In the *Pirke R. Eliezer* §31, Abraham’s response to Isaac in Gen 22:8 included “my son, *thou art the lamb*”¹⁸⁷ A representation of the *Akedah* found in a mosaic on the floor of a 6th-century synagogue in *Beit Alpha* identifies Abraham and Isaac, as the words under God's hand command, "Lay not [your hand]." Next to the ram are the words, "Behold [the] lamb" [Joh 1:36! cf Rev 14:1].¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ The *Book of Jubilees* (17-18) reports that God spoke to Abraham on the 12th day of the first month, which would seem to mean that the *aqedah*, three days later, took place on the fourteenth of Nisan. The tradition connecting the date of the *Aqedah* with the date of the Passover does not appear in early rabbinic literature, although I. Levi mentioned that the *Mekhilta* (pasha 7, p. 24; 11, p. 39) connects the blood of Isaac(!) with the blood of the paschal lamb when the Jews left Egypt. ["Le sacrifice d'Isaac et la mort du Jesus" *REJ* 64 (1912) 166. The blood of Isaac may also refer to circumcisional blood. The circumcision of Isaac was considered by some to be a partial sacrifice. See Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism* (University of Chicago Press, 1996) 101-103]. The identity of the dates is found in rabbinic literature only in the *Palestinian Targum to Exod* 12:42 and in a late source (*ExodR* 15.11).

¹⁸⁸ As early as the 1st century, Philo, for instance, discusses the *Akedah* on various occasions, even claiming that Isaac was actually the son of God, not of Abraham, and that his mother Sarah was a virgin when she conceived him. His story became a type of the resurrection; R. Judah says: When the sword touched Isaac's throat his soul flew clean out of him. And when He let His voice be heard from between the cherubim, "Lay not thy hand upon the lad." The lad's soul was returned to his body. Then his father unbound him and Isaac rose, knowing that in this way the dead would come back to life in the future; whereupon he began to recite, "Blessed are You, LORD, who resurrects the dead." (*Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer*)



Representation of the **Akedah** as found in a mosaic on the floor of 6th century Jewish synagogue at Beit Alpha.

Melito of Sardis saw this as one of the OT passages that clearly pointed towards the Passion of the Christ:

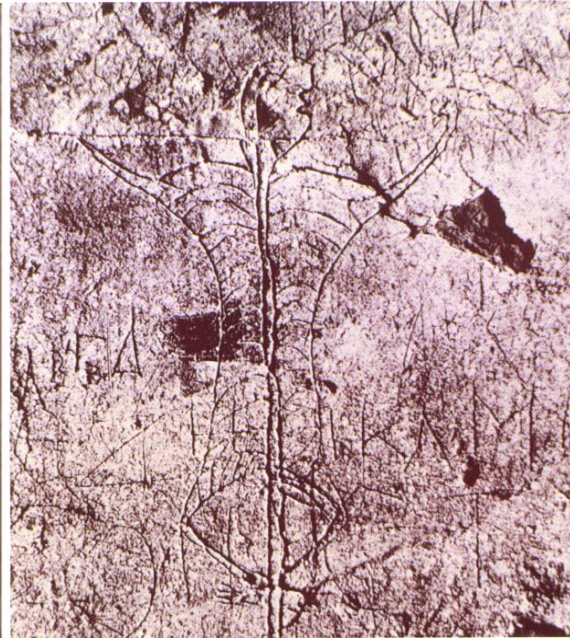
“For the Lord was a lamb, like the ram which Abraham saw caught in the bush *Sabec* סָבֵק. But this bush represented the cross, and that place Jerusalem, and the lamb the Lord bound for slaughter. For as a ram was He bound, says he concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, and as a lamb was He shorn, and as a sheep was He led to the slaughter, and as a lamb was He crucified; and He carried the cross on His shoulders when He was led up to be slain, as was Isaac by his father . . . The word *Sabek* some have rendered ‘remission’ [ἀφεσις] others ‘upright’ [ὀρθιος] as if the meaning, agreeing with the popular belief, were—a goat walking erect up to a bush, and there standing erect caught¹⁸⁹ by his horns, so as to be a plain type of the cross.”

David foresaw in the spirit another aspect of Christ’s death associated with Roman crucifixion:

¹⁸⁹ Compare two Christian *Scholia* on Genesis XXII. 13 [In the edition of the LXX. published by Card. Caraffè, 1581] “The Syriac and the Hebrew use the word “suspended,” [κρεμόμενος] as more clearly typifying the cross. For this reason it is not translated [in the LXX, only transliterated], because the single Hebrew word signifies when translated many things. To those, however, who ask it is proper to give an answer and to say that *Sabek* denotes lifted up ἐπιρμένος”

“They have pierced my hands and my feet. **I can count all my bones**; people stare and gloat over me” [Psalm 22:16-17].

A modern Ethiopian icon of the crucifixion preserves this ancient historical memory [left]:



It is strikingly similar to one of the oldest known depictions of crucifixion,
¹⁹⁰ *Il Graffito della Taberna di Pozzuoli* [right]. The figure appears either scourged to the point that his rib-cage is bared, flayed, or possibly disemboweled with the chest cavity exposed.

Compare the “crucified” lambs prepared for a Samaritan Passover:¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ The 1st century Pozzuoli crucifixion graffito has two different interpretations. A. Maiuri says it depicts Jesus (“La Campania al tempo dell’approdo di S. Paolo” in *Studi Romani*, 6 [1961], p.135), contra M. (“Iscrizioni greche e latine in una Taberna di Pozzuoli” *Acta of the Fifth Epigraphic Congress*, IPS: Roma, 1967, pp. 219-223); *CIL* IV. 1. Supp. 9983.

¹⁹¹ Jewish rite is described by Justin Martyr [*Dial c. Trypho* 40]: The Pascal Lamb, that ‘is to be roasted, is roasted in a form like to that of the Cross. ‘For one spit is thrust through the animal from head to tail,’ and another through its breast, to which its forefeet are attached.’ He naturally saw in it a likeness of the Crucifixion. But his remark, under any view, is interesting: first, because, being a native of Nablus, he probably drew his notices of the Passover from this very celebration, which, as it would thus appear, has, even in this minute particular, been but very slightly modified since he saw it in the second century; and also because, as he draws no distinction between this rite and that of the Jews in general, we have a right to infer that the Samaritan Passover is on the whole a faithful representation of the Jewish. That the spit was run right through the body of the animal in the Jewish ritual, and was of wood, as in the Samaritan, is clear from the account in the Mishna. [“The Crucifixion of the Paschal Lamb” by Joseph Tabory © 1996 [Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, University of Pennsylvania](http://www.cajsa.org/). Abstract Justin Martyr depicted the paschal lamb as being offered in the form of a cross and he claimed that the manner in which the paschal lamb was slaughtered prefigured the crucifixion of Jesus. It is generally thought that Justin, who was born and raised in Samaria, was thinking of the Samaritan Passover, but the present day Samaritan practice would not justify his depiction of the lamb in the form of a cross. An examination of the rabbinic evidence, on the other hand, seems to show that in Jerusalem the Jewish paschal lamb was offered in a manner which resembled a crucifixion. The earlier Samaritan practice, it is suggested, followed the Jerusalem tradition but has since been changed.]



THE SPITTED SACRIFICIAL LAMBS

On oaken spits slightly longer than the depth of the ground oven, the dressed lambs are placed lengthwise, the heads hanging down. "Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof."



The striking similarity resonates with Scripture: "But I was like a lamb or an ox that is *brought to the slaughter*" [Jer 11:19]; "Then I saw a *Lamb*, looking *as if it had been slain*"¹⁹² [Rev 5:6].

For Jesus, the High Cross would be used, as Chrysostom alludes to [Homily V on *1Cor*], known as the *immissa*, the quadrilateral cross of Christ to which Nonnus¹⁹³ refers, with the vertical trunk extending above the transverse beam, to accommodate the *titulus*; it was thus higher than the crosses of the two thieves, as it was meant for their "ringleader," his crime being judged a graver one.¹⁹⁴

The theological import of this did not escape Athanasius:¹⁹⁵

"What other kind of death could it be done, save by a death in the air, that is, on the cross? Here, again, you see how right and natural it was that the Lord should suffer thus; for being thus 'lifted up,' He cleansed the air from all the evil influences of the enemy." [On the *Incarnation* 25]

¹⁹² Mickelson: σφάζω *sphazo* (sfad'-zo) v.1. to butcher (especially an animal for food or in sacrifice); VWS: "The verb indicates violence, butchery. See on *1Jo* 3:12. It is also the sacrificial word. *Exo* 12:6" [LXX]; Clarke: "As if now in the act of being offered. This is very remarkable; so important is the sacrificial offering of Christ in the sight of God that he is still represented as being in the very act of pouring out his blood for the offences of man." LSJ: "II esp. slaughter victims for sacrifice, 1.459"

¹⁹³ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11100a.htm>

¹⁹⁴ According to Suetonius [*vita Galba* ix], Emperor Galba did the same in the case of a certain criminal "for whom he caused to be made a very high cross painted white" - just as Carthago of Carthage (*Cod. Justin.* XVIII.7.15) was raised in *altissimum crucem*. Haman's case, *Esther*, 7.9 f., is applicable. The Hebrew expression is equivocal, but the LXX in 7.10 reads σταυρωθήτω (the only place in the O. T. where the verb or noun is used in this sense), and the *Apocr. Add.* 16.18 ἐσταυρώσθαι, "on a very high cross made as a special aggravation of the dishonor... Some confirmation of the view here proposed may be derived from the crucifixion of victims by the Jews as late as the fifth century A.D., probably at the feast of Purim (Frazer, *op. cit.* III, 172 ff.), with which this Haman execution was connected, and if so doubtless in imitation of the traditional form by which Haman was put to death." [William A. Oldfather] See Sokrates, *H. E.* VII.16; Theophyl. *Chronogr.* I.129 (Classen); *Codex Theod.* XVI.8.18.

¹⁹⁵ Died May 2, 373 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athanasius_of_Alexandria

The full Roman *crux immissa* had 5 components: the vertical stake [*stipes*], the horizontal gibbet [*patibulum*], the inscription [*titulus*], the seat or saddle [*sedile*], and the footrest [*suppedaneum*]. Although rarely depicted, early Church fathers mention the seat. Irenaeus¹⁹⁶ mentions the part “in the middle, on which the person rests” [*Adv Haer* 2.24.4].

Tertullian's description is very clear:

"A part, and indeed the principal part of the cross, is any post which is fixed in an upright position; but to us the entire cross is imputed including its transverse beam, and the projecting bar which serves as a seat." [*Ad Nationes* ii.8¹⁹⁷]

Justin Martyr found Biblical foreshadowing in the *sedile*, also known as a *cornu* [literally “horn”]:

▣ ““His beauty is the firstling of a bullock; his horns the horns of an unicorn: with these shall he push the nations from one end of the earth to another’ [Deut 33:13–17].... the part which is fixed in the centre, on which are suspended those who are crucified, also **stands out** like a **horn** and it also looks like a horn conjoined and fixed with the other horns. And the expression, ‘With these shall he push as with horns the nations from one end of the earth to another,’ is indicative of what is now the fact among all the nations” [c. AD 138, *Dial cum Trypho* 91].

Athanasius uses the same language as classical writers when he refers to “the very Christ Who **mounted** on the cross” [*On the Incarnation* 29].

Chariton wrote:

"They found the others already hanging on their **crosses**, and he was just **mounting his cross**. . . . So the executioner stopped his work, and Chaereas **descended from the cross**.”¹⁹⁸

Seneca¹⁹⁹ once exclaimed: “You may nail me up and set **my seat** upon the piercing cross!” [*Epis.* CI].

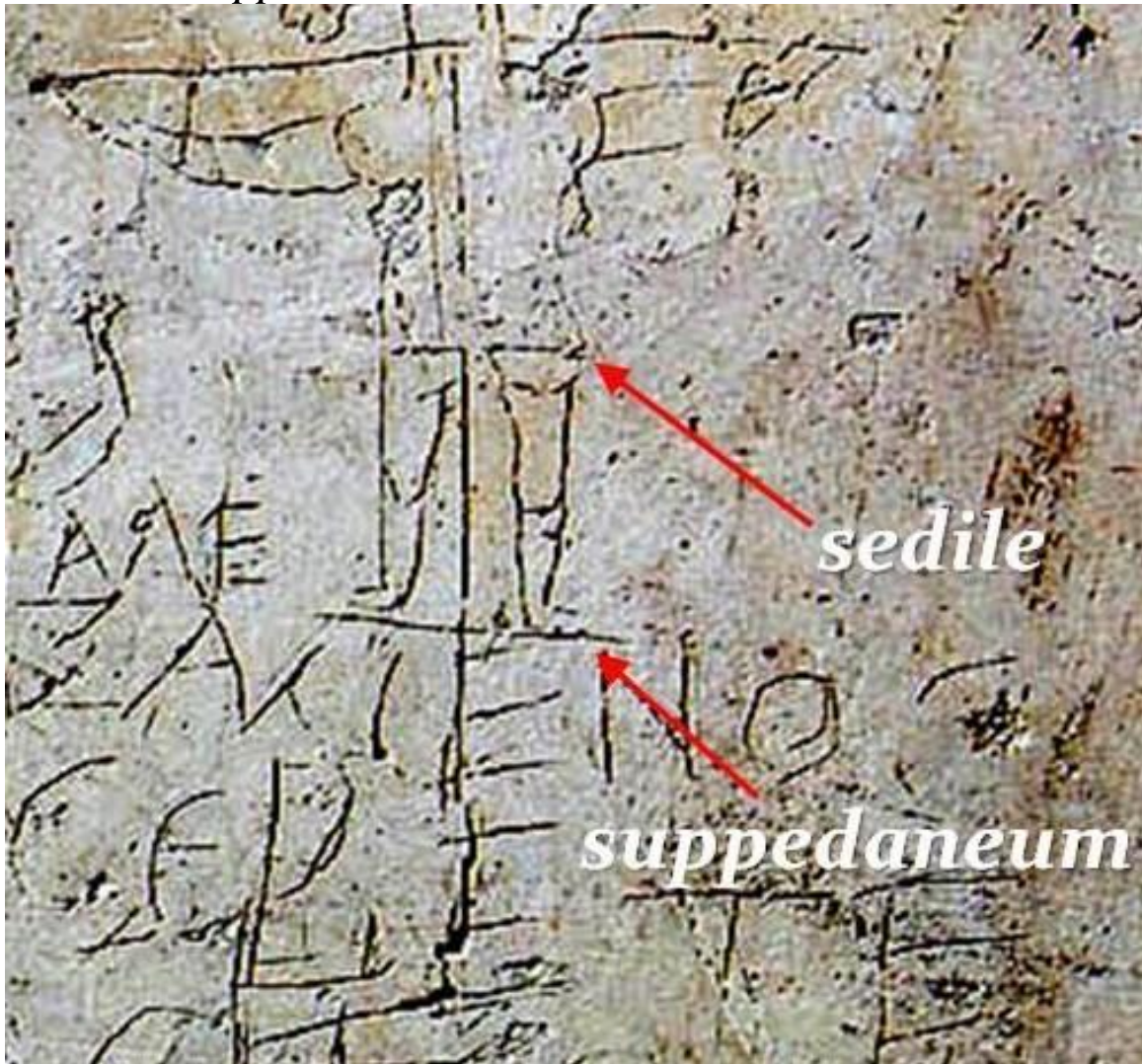
¹⁹⁶ Ca. 178; <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/irenaeus.html>

¹⁹⁷ See Cicero *against Verres* v.66. The *sedile* would be obscured by either a loin-cloth or robe added in Christian depictions out of respect for the Saviour

¹⁹⁸ Chariton, *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, 4.3.5-6; written in the first century BC or early first century AD

¹⁹⁹ Roman Stoic philosopher and statesman (c. 4 BC – AD 65); http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Lucius_Annaeus_Seneca

The 1st century Puozzoli crucifixion graffito [see later] also depicts a *cornu* style *sedile*, while the infamous *graffito blasfemo* clearly depicts both the *sedile* & *suppedaneum*:



Crucifixion of Christ as depicted in the *graffito blasfemo*

This wooden support beneath the feet is first mentioned by Gregory of Tours²⁰⁰ (*De Gloriâ Martyrum* vi; Cyprian, Theodoret, and Rufinus hint at it), and would have been that into which Christ's feet were nailed.

The historical incidental of the *suppedaneum* becomes not-so-incidental in light of OT prophetic foreshadowing. When the Psalmist commands, “Worship at this footstool... Worship at his holy mountain” [Psalm 98:5,9], the Church illustrated the passage with the post-deposition Cross,

²⁰⁰ Saint Gregory of Tours (November 30, c. 538 – November 17, 594) was a Gallo-Roman historian and bishop of Tours; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregory_of_Tours

and the image of Calvary.²⁰¹ The *suppedaneum* was the Lord's literal footrest.

Many hymns of the Church invite us to “Survey the wondrous Cross,” and contemplate the “Sacred Head now wounded” with the eyes of the heart [Eph 1:18], as Nicodemus and Joseph did physically. Similarly, the call to “worship at the place where his feet stood” in Psalm 132:7, could not help but be seen by the Church as a reference to the foot of the Cross.²⁰²

David clearly states: “**They have pierced my hands and my feet**” [Psalm 22:16²⁰³]. Note: not necessarily into the joints, which would likely break the smaller bones. Another Davidic prophecy excludes this possibility:

“**He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken**” [Psalms 34:20].

Tertullian affirms (out of his judicial familiarity with the crucifixion process):

“Christ, whom—after the slaughter of prophets—they slew, and exhausted their savagery by transfixing His *sinews* [not bones] with nail” [Adv Jud 10].

The nails in the hands or wrist were not meant to bear the weight of the crucified victim, as known from eye-witness depictions of crucifixions.²⁰⁴

Finally, the *titulus damnationes* was nailed to the cross, as Nonnus' paraphrase of John's Gospel reports [19:19]. The apostle Paul alludes to this in Colossians; in Christ's crucifixion, He was taking upon Himself our sentence of condemnation, and “**nailling it to His cross**” [2:14]. Sozomen

²⁰¹ *Pantocrator Psalter*, f. 140, illustrates verse 9 with a miniature of Golgotha surmounted by a sanctuary. *Chludov*, f. 98V, has a miniature of the empty cross. The same subject is represented in the *Barberini Psalter*, f. 168, illustrating verse 5. The *Paris Psalter*, f. 6V, also has a miniature of the empty cross illustrating verse 5, together with, on f. 7, a second miniature, illustrating verse 9, of a cross upon which is placed a clipeate icon of Christ. In London, f. 131, verse 5 is illustrated with a miniature of John Chrysostom presiding at the rite of the *Exaltation of the Cross*. Most recently Cutler has pointed out that verse 9—and later verse 5—were used as the *prokeimenon* in the office of the *Exaltation of the Cross*. Theodore Studite's *Homily 2, In adorationem crucis*, preached on the occasion of the adoration of the Cross in mid-Lent, in which he quotes verse 5 of this Psalm.

²⁰² In London, f. 172V, and *Barberini*, f. 223, the verse is illustrated with a miniature of Christ, wearing a long straight *colobium*, attached to the Cross. To left and right stand figures inclined towards him. This verse was quoted in the troparion Σήμερον ἡ προθητικὸν πεπλήρωται λόγιον, which was frequently used in Byzantine worship, notably for the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross and in the rite of the veneration of the Cross on the 4th Tuesday in Lent [*Typicon*, I, p. 28 ; II, p. 40 ; *Initia hymnorum*, III, p. 496]

²⁰³ Tertullian, speaking of the sufferings of Christ, and applying this passage to his death, says that “this was the special [or proper *-propria*] severity of the cross.” *Adv. Marcionem*, iii. 19; [Septuagint](#) has ὠρυζαν χειράς μου καὶ πόδας. The verb—כָּאֲרַי—properly means “to dig, to bore through, to pierce.” (Peshito ܠܒܝܬܐ, Vulg. *foderunt*, Jer. *fixerunt*)

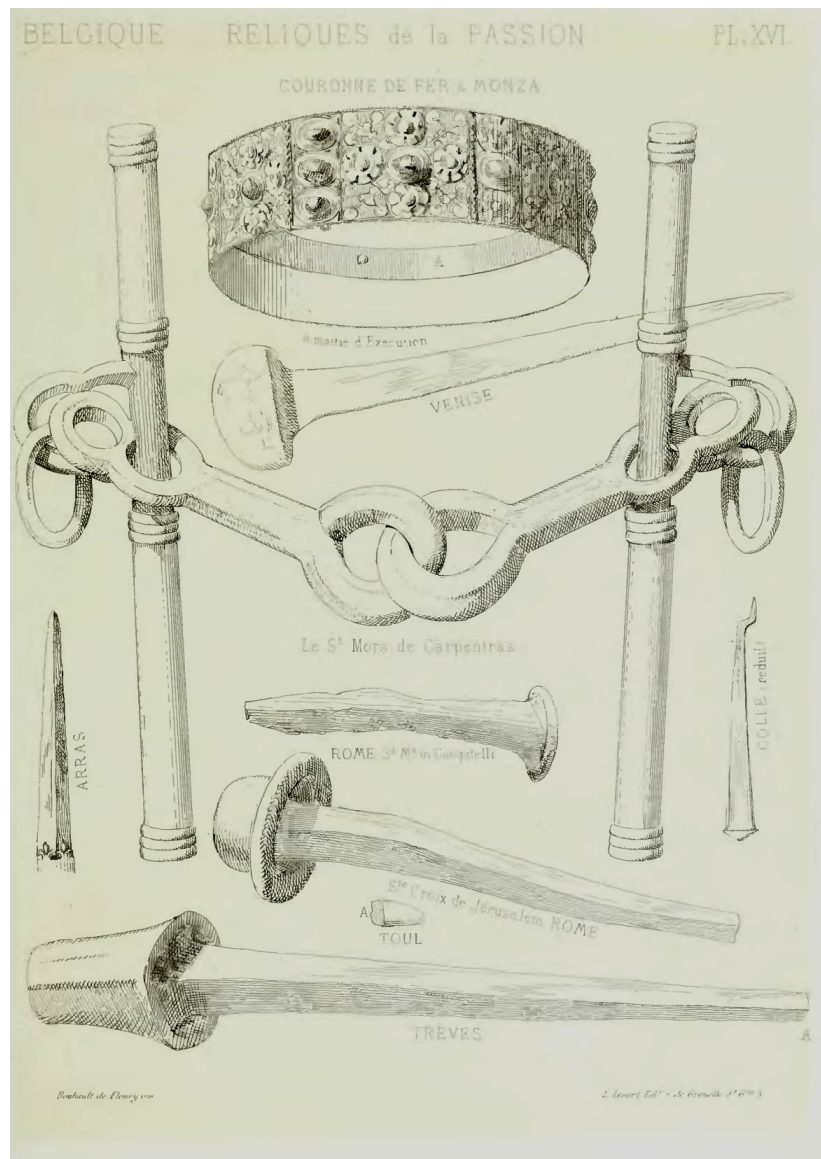
²⁰⁴ The Greek playwright Plautus reported the typical crucifixion called for a nail in each extremity [*Mostellaria* 351].

reported St. Helena's discovery of the nails during her excavation of Golgotha ca. AD 324, and attached prophetic significance to it:

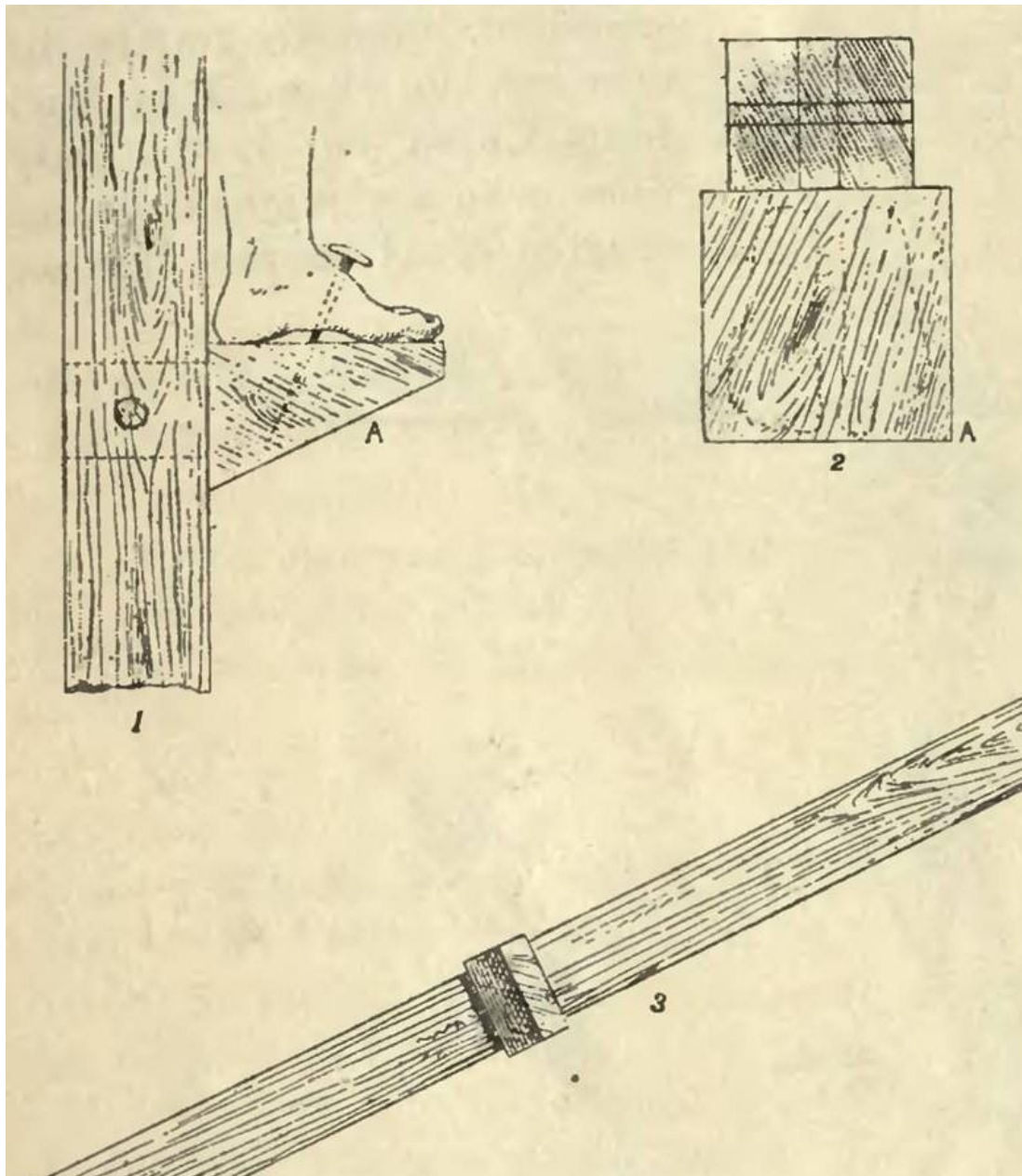
▣ “the empress sent part of [the Cross] to her son Constantine, together with the nails by which the body of Christ had been fastened. Of these, it is related, the emperor had a head-piece and bit made for his horse, according to the prophecy of Zechariah, who referred to this period when he said, “that which shall be upon **the bit of the horse shall be holy** to the Lord Almighty.” (Zech. 14:20, LXX) [*Eccl Hist* 2.1].²⁰⁵

In 1870, famous French architect and archeologist Rohault de Fleury published his dissertation cataloguing and depicting all the available “Relics of the Passion” in Europe, including the nails recovered from the Tomb of Christ.

²⁰⁵ See also Rufinus, *H.E.* i.7- 8, and Theodoret *H.E.* 1.17, *Soc. H. E.* I. 17; Sulp. Sev. *H. S.* ii. 33, 34. Ambrose also informs us that St. Helen had one nail converted into a bridle for Constantine's horse (“*De obitu Theodosii*” 47, in *P. L.*, XVI, 1402) The *Holy Bit of Carpentras* was brought to that town between 1204 and 1206



The purpose of the nails was not to “suspend” the victim in a load-bearing sense, but simply to “secure them” in the most painful and shameful way possible on the gibbet and *suppedaneum*.



Rohault de Fleury's reconstruction of Christ's *suppedaneum* based on "Relics of the Passion" and classical sources

The Romans actually designed it to be an agonizingly slow and painful death from exposure and starvation, not exhaustion.²⁰⁶ This is why Pilate was shocked to learn of Christ's relatively early death [Mark 15:44], and why the other two had to have their legs broken to expedite their demise [John 19:31-32] in a process known as *crurifragium*²⁰⁷ [Cicero *Philipp* 13.xii].

²⁰⁶ Josephus [Vita 76] and Church history records victims hanging for **days** on the crucifix, with nails securing them to prevent rescue or escape for the duration. See Senec., *Epist.* 101, *Acts of Andrew*, Isidore, V, 27; Jacobus Bosius, *Crux Triumphans et Gloriosa*, (Ex Officina Plantiniana, 1617) pp. 8, 9, 43, 47, 94, 112—115; Alban Butler *Lives of the Fathers, &c.*, vol. vi. pp. 251, 252 re: Timotheus and Maura, a married pair, are said to have lived nine days and nights, and expired on the tenth day, in AD 286; cf vol. xii. pp. 175, 176 ;—*Acta Sanctorum*, cura Bollandi. vol. i. pp. 659—662.

²⁰⁷ The ancient apocryphon, the *Gospel of Peter* uses the technical Greek term σκελοκοπηθη [4.14]. Only in this way was it possible to take down the corpse on the very evening of the execution [Tertullian *Adv. Jud.* x; Isidore V.xxvii; Lactantius *Div Inst* 4.16] to address Jewish sensitivities [Josephus *BJ* 4.5.2; *Gosp Pet* 5.15]



The 1st -3rd century signets²⁰⁸ above show the outstretched *Orant*-posture, and also contain the imagery of 12 disciples gathered around the cross, symbolizing their role as the committee of twelve appointed to corroborate the priest's selection of the paschal lamb,²⁰⁹ in this case, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" [John 1:29].

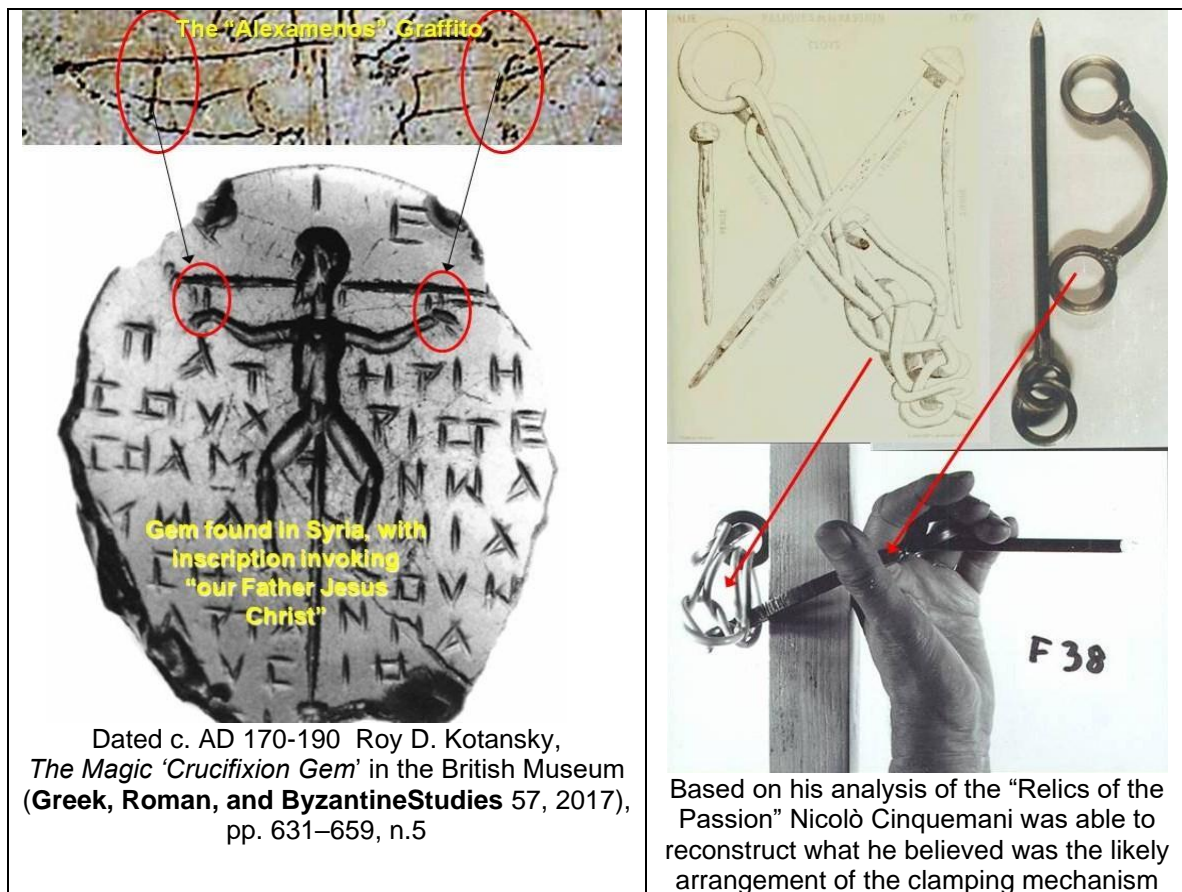
Nailing was sometimes accompanied by a binding mechanism afterward,²¹⁰ at the point of actual crucifixion as reported by Nonnus and Hilary [*de Trin* 10.13²¹¹] in Christ's case. As Melito observed, "The one who hung the earth in space, is himself hanged; the one who fixed the heavens in place, is himself impaled; the one who firmly fixed all things, is himself **firmly fixed** to the tree." [*Peri Pasch* 96]

²⁰⁸ "Found at Constanza (Kustendje), Roumania, with other gems dating from the 1st to the 3rd century" Ormonde Maddock Dalton [[Catalogue of early Christian antiquities and objects from the Christian East 1901](#)] - [Page 7](#) [left]; Leclercq H in Cabrol F, Leclercq H (eds.). *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie* [Paris 1907], v.i., n. 75

²⁰⁹ See m. *Pesachim* 5.1; the lambs for the daily holocaust, after having been duly examined, were kept (never less than six at a time) in a room in the temple, set apart for this purpose, in the NW. corner of the priests' court (m. *Middoth* 1.6); they had to be in readiness four days before they were offered; a second inspection preceded the slaughter. A similar delegation of twelve laymen appears at the Samaritan Passover. Among the very first visitors to witness the festival after its restoration was the German Orientalist, J.H. Petermann, who was present April 22, 1853 *Reisen im Orient*, i. pp. 260-292, Leipzig, 1860

²¹⁰ Lucian even applied this Roman procedure to the legend of Prometheus: "Do you suppose there is not room on the Caucasus to peg out a couple of us? Come, your right hand! Clamp it down, Hephaestus, and in with the nails; bring down the hammer with a will. Now the left, make sure work of that too." (*Prometheus* 2). Aeschylus, besides the nails, describes a girth for Prometheus. We find evidence of this additional binding in other early pagan depictions of Christ's crucifixion on engraved gems & graffiti [see below]

²¹¹ Migne, X.352A where the body of Jesus is thus described: *sed forte penduli in cruce corporis poenae, et colligantium funium violentia vincula et adactorum clavorum cruda vulnera sunt timori: et videamus cuius corporis homo Christus sit, ut in suspensam et nodatam et transfossam carnem dolor invaserit.*



Regardless of these mechanisms, as St. Catherine of Sienna put it, "Mere nails could not have held God and Human on the Cross. It was love that kept him there." Even earlier, Chrysostom preached:

"Say not then, 'why did He not help Himself on the Cross?' - for He was hastening on to close conflict with Death himself. He descended not from the Cross, *not* because He could not, but because **He would not**. For Him Whom the tyranny of death restrained not, how could the nails of the Cross restrain?" [Homily IV, *on 1Cor*]

In fact, the arms outstretched,²¹² as if in the position of prayer – the *Orant*-posture – was also seen as significant, spiritually and prophetically:

"Of whom, for instance, do the prophets say 'I was made manifest to those who did not seek Me,I **stretched out My hands** to a disobedient and gainsaying people'? [Isa 45:1-2].... And, again, what kind of man is this prophet, who was not only revealed after being

²¹² Seneca *alium in cruce membra distendere*, "another to have his limbs stretched upon the *crux*" (*De Ira*, 1.2.2), Plautus *Miles Gloriosus* 359 I suspect you will have to die outside the gates, when, with hands outstretched and nailed, you will be carrying your cross. *Credo ego istoc extemplo tibi esse eundum actutum extra portam, dispressis manibus, patibulum quom habebis*; "Suppose we crucify [ἀνεσταυρώσθαι] him half-way up somewhere hereabouts over the ravine, with his hands outstretched from crag to crag." (Lucian *Prometheus*, 1)

hidden, but also **stretched out his hands** upon the cross?”

[Athanasius *on the Incarnation* 38²¹³].

This posture of intercession is manifested in Christ’s prayer on the cross, also in fulfillment of prophecy: “Then said Jesus,

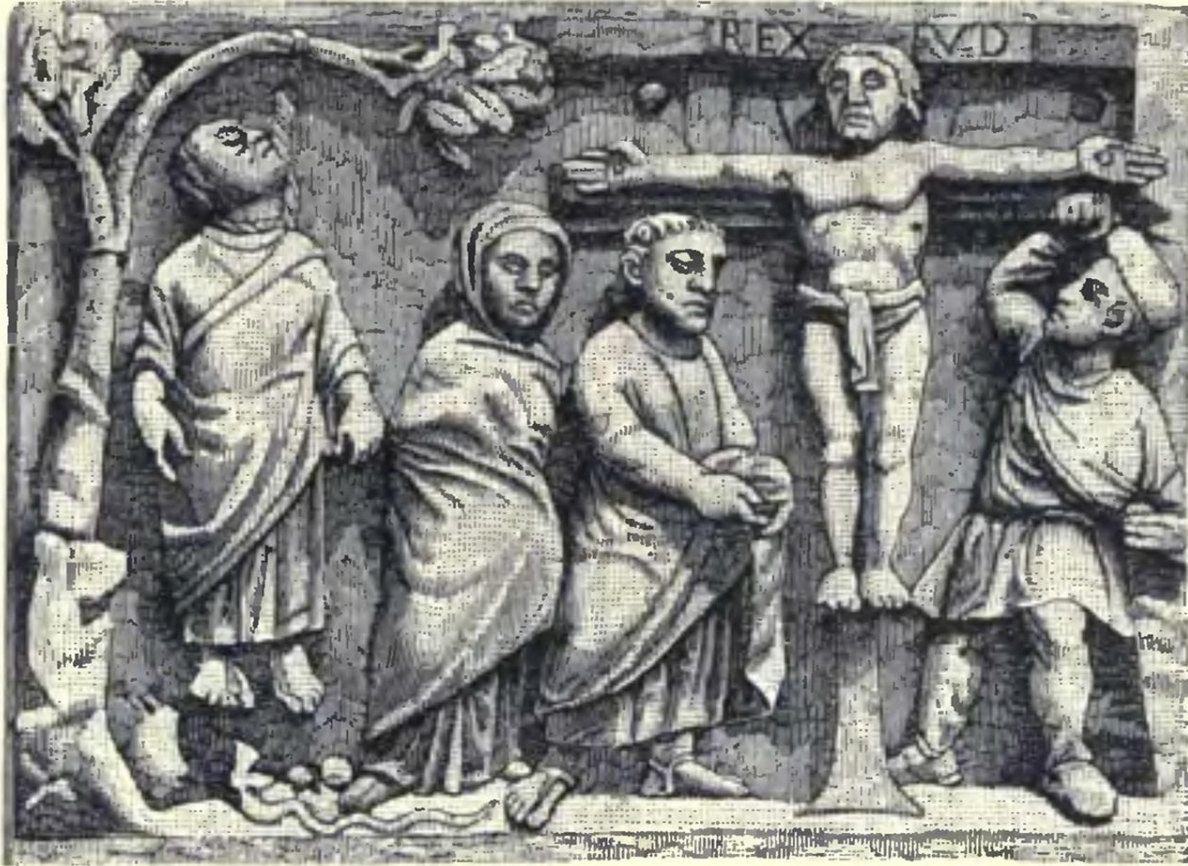


Fig. 52. Elfenbein des British Museum.

Christ crucified stretching out His hands as depicted in 4th-century ivory carving

‘Father, forgive them; for they know not²¹⁴ what they do’.” [Luke 23:34]; “. . . and [He] made intercession for the transgressors” [Isa 53:12]. This petition became the model for the Protomartyr of the Church:

“And [Stephen] kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, ‘Lord, lay not this sin to their charge’; and when he had said this, he fell asleep” [Acts 7:60].

James the Just, “the brother of Jesus” is recorded to have followed this example at his own martyrdom:

²¹³ See *Iren Demo Apost* “Who also delivers us from Amalek by the expansion of His hands, and brings us to the kingdom of the Father. 79. And, again, concerning His cross Isaiah says thus: *I have stretched out my hands all the day long to a disobedient and gainsaying people*. For this is an indication of the cross”; cf *Adv Haer V*, xvii. 4, *Barn.* XII. 4; *Just. M. Ap.* I, 35, *Dial.* 91, 112, 131

²¹⁴ Paul also claims this clause for his forgiveness: “Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” [1Ti 1:13]

“...threw down the just man [James]... [and] began to stone him: for he was not killed by the fall; but he turned, and kneeled down, and said: ‘I beseech Thee, Lord God our Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do’.”²¹⁵

This expressed sentiment on the lips of thousand of martyrs has since resulted in the conviction and conversion of many persecutors and unbelievers throughout the centuries. **Jerome** reports:

“But by so much did the Lord love Jerusalem that He wept for it and beat His chest, and while hanging on the cross he said: ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do’ - and thus He obtained what He had requested, and **many thousands** from the Jews came to faith” [to *Hedibia*, epistle 120].

We learn from Haimo of Auxerre [commentary II, *On Isaiah* 53.12] that Jerome’s source for this information was the 1st-century *Gospel of the Nazoraeans*.²¹⁶ The medieval *History of the Passion of the Lord* [folio 55, recto] mentions that this account specified 8,000 Jews coming to the faith as a result of Christ’s plea.²¹⁷ **What we glean from these reports is that at this one moment, there was a crowd of at least 8,000 within earshot of Christ’s utterance on “Golgotha Plaza.”** This is consistent with Josephus’ report that up to 3,000,000 festival pilgrims could be streaming in and out of Jerusalem during the Passover season [*BJ* 2:280; cp TB *Pesach* 64b].²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Eusebius, *History of the Church* 2.23.3-18: quoting Hegisippus Παρακαλω, κυριε, Θεε, πατερ, αφες αυτοις, ου γαρ οιδασι τι ποιουσιν.

²¹⁶ “As it has it in the *Gospel of the Nazoraeans*, at this voice of the Lord **many thousands** of Jews standing around the cross came to faith” [commentary II, *On Isaiah* 53.12]

²¹⁷ “And note that in the gospel of the Nazoraeans it is read that at this virtuous prayer of Christ **eight thousand** were afterward converted to the faith. There were to be sure three thousand on the day of Pentecost” (From the *History of the Passion of the Lord*, folio 55 recto, concerning the words of forgiveness from the cross)

²¹⁸ The historian Josephus records contemporary Passover celebrations in which he estimates that the participants who gathered in Jerusalem to perform the sacrifice in the year 65 CE were “not less than three million” (Josephus *Wars* 2:280). The Talmud (*Pesachim* 64b) similarly records: King Agrippa once wished to take a census of the hosts of Israel. He said to the high Priest, “Cast your eyes on the Passover offerings.” He took a kidney from each, and 600,000 pairs of kidneys were found there, twice as many as those who departed from Egypt, excluding those who were unclean and those who were on a distant journey, and there was not a single paschal lamb for which more than ten people had not registered; and they called it: “The Passover of the dense throngs.”



Golgotha (The Crucifixion of Christ) (Ilya Repin, 1869)

Amidst this brutal spectacle, a perverse element of gaming is found in the prophecy of Psalm 22, “and **cast lots** upon my vesture” [Psalm 22:18²¹⁹]. The prophetic imagery is made clear in an illustration accompanying Psalm 23 in the famous *Utrecht Psalter*,²²⁰ which accurately depicts an ancient Roman lot-casting machine among the *Arma Christi*²²¹ at the crucifixion site:

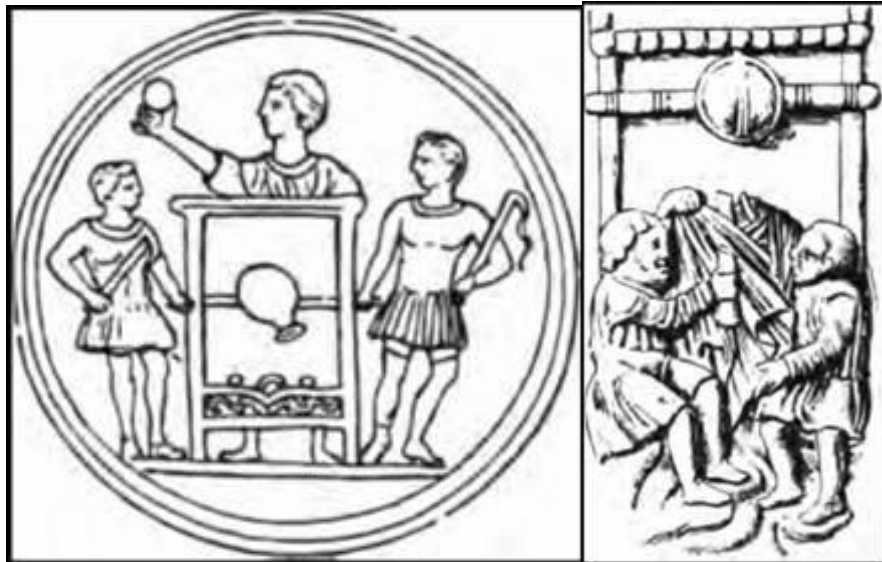
²¹⁹ Iren Demo Apost 80. “And again David says: *They looked upon me, they parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture they cast lots*. For at His crucifixion the soldiers parted His garments **as they were accustomed**. And the garments they parted by tearing; but for the vesture, because it was woven from the top and was not sewn, they cast lots, that to whomsoever it should fall he should take it”

²²⁰ Walter de Gray Birch [The history, art and palaeography of the manuscript styled the Utrecht psalter](#).. (Samuel Bagster 1876). [“The Utrecht Psalter,’ written and illustrated in the early, ninth century at Hautvillers in the diocese of Keims, probably by an Anglo-Saxon is clearly based either upon a model of the fourth or fifth century, or upon an early copy of such a model . . . More conclusive still is the illustration of the passage in Psalm 21: ‘they parted my garments among them.’ &c., where the curious machine used in the Hippodrome at Constantinople for casting the lots for chariot-races is introduced. An object of this kind cannot have been known in the west of Europe at the time when the Utrecht Psalter was written” O.M. Dalton *Byzantine art and archaeology* 1911]

²²¹ A medieval theological concept wherein the implements of Christ’ passion and crucifixion are recaptured from the enemy and displayed as the spoils of His victory over Death; the earliest depiction of this is the 9th century Utrecht Psalter, which however is based on a 4th century original



This lot-casting machine was a fixture at Roman spectacles, as exemplified by the marble reliefs of the 4th century at the Hippodrome in Constantinople, showing chariot races and the lot-casting urn used for deciding the positions of the drivers.²²² This Roman medallion depicting a lot-casting machine can be compared to a 12th century ivory carving of the Crucifixion.



Pilate's *pièce de résistance* is his dramatic and strategic revelation of the *titulus*:

“And Pilate wrote a title, and put *it* on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.” (John 19:19)

²²² Lot-casting was always in deference to the goddess Fortuna in such a context, because the spectacle also had significant religious connotations beyond just entertainment. Crucifixion, in particular, began with profoundly religious and sacred overtones, going back through the mists of time in ancient Etruria (Roman penal code recognized it as a form of capital punishment as far back as could be remembered). It began as a primitive custom of “hanging” (*arbori suspendere*) on the *arbor infelix* [unfruitful or accursed tree²²²], for redemption of the land from blood-guilt. Seneca still called the cross the *infelix lignum* (*Epistola* 101). Related to this concept was the *delubrum*, a wooden representation of a god (ξόανον). More specifically, Art historian Anne Weis²²² has demonstrated from pagan iconography and classical sources that the *arbor infelix* was originally associated with the gods and omens of the *underworld* [Macrobis *Saturnalia* 3.20.3]. In the other words, spectators were gathered to see a battle of spiritual warfare being waged, in which the “gods of the netherworld” would ritualistically claim their victim, in a primeval play of Roman Justice.

The banter among the officials at the foot of the cross regarding the proclamation of the *titulus*²²³ implies Pilate's overseeing presence at Golgotha, consistent with the depiction from the *domus Tiberiana* [see above], where his wife seems to still be pleading, "Have nothing to do with that *just man*" [Matt 27:19], as if perhaps the tragic irony of the entire spectacle was beginning to dawn on Pilate.

The case having been closed and the sentencing finished, the Temple authorities are denied any appeals at the point of execution. Christ's mission began with His official recognition as the "*King of the Jews*" and rightful heir of David's throne – not by the Temple authorities – but by the Gentile Magi from Parthia. Christ's earthly mission would end with His official recognition as the "*King of the Jews*" and rightful heir of David's throne – not by the Temple authorities – but by the ruling of the Gentile representative of Imperial Rome. Pilate leaves the scene with a dramatic flourish: "What *I* have written, *I* have written." [John 19:22]

This crowd at Golgotha "Plaza" included a number of official observers [Herodian, Roman, and Sanhedral], and supervisors. There would have been a detail of one *quaternion* for each crucifixion, a total of twelve soldiers²²⁴ with 3 centurions overseeing the three *quaternia*. The Cross was not crowded with only human spectators.

"for we have come to be a **spectacle** to all creation—alike to *angels* and to men." [1Cor 4:9 (WEY)]; To the intent that **now** unto the principalities and powers - ταις αρχαις και ταις εξουσιαις – in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God" [Ephesians 3:10].

As Christ said,

²²³ Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, "Write not, '*The King of the Jews*' - but that 'He said *I am King of the Jews*.'" [John 19:21]. Jewish scholar Schalom Ben-Chorin argued the inscription as written by Pilate would have spelt by initials the *Tetragrammaton* [Yeshua Ha'notzri Wa'melech Ha'yehudim = YHWH], registered as part of their offense in John 19:21 [Bruder Jesus: Der Nazarener in jüdischer Sicht By Schalom Ben-Chorin (Published by List, 1967); Brother Jesus: the Nazarene through Jewish eyes By Schalom Ben-Chorin, Jared S. Klein, Max Reinhart; Translated by Schalom Ben-Chorin, Jared S. Klein, Max Reinhart [Published by University of Georgia Press, 2001] pp.180-182 [INRI=YHWH]

²²⁴ Letter of Pilate to Herod "And my wife *Procla*, having believed on account of the visions which appeared to her while I was hesitating to deliver Jesus up through thy counsel, when thou sentest that I should deliver him to the people of Israel, because of the ill-will they had, she having heard that Jesus was risen, and had appeared in Galilee, left me; and took with her *Longinus* the faithful centurion, and twelve soldiers, the same that had watched at the sepulchre" M. R. James, *Apocrypha Anecdota II* [Texts and Studies ed. J. A. Robinson, V) 1S97, p. xlviii: "they are found in a MS of the sixth or seventh century in Syriac; and they may quite well be a couple of centuries older than that." Cf. B. H. Cowper, *Apocryphal Gospels*, p. 389. The *Letters of Pilate to Herod* are "produced perhaps about A. D. 400." In the *Hebrew discourse to the Armenians by St Bartholomew* [quoted in the *Pantheon* of Godfrey of Viterbo (died in 1191); see E. du Meril, *Poesies populaires latines du Moyen-Age*, 1847, p. 321], fifteen of the 30 coins returned by Judas are used to bribe the individual guards at the tomb [Matt 28:9-15]. The Turfan "Gospel Fragment" M-18 also references "centurions and soldiers." This is the "watch" Pilate refers to [Matt 27:65, cp. Matt 27:54].

“Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions [λεγεωνας] of angels?” [Matt 26:53].

Legions (λεγεωνας) was a Latinate word Christ used for the benefit of the arresting soldiers. A full Roman legion had 6,100 footmen and 726 horsemen in the time of Augustus. So, these more than 72,000²²⁵ angels were Christ’s personal attendants [cp Mark 1:11, Psalm 91:11], probably the same fraction of the “heavenly hosts” that were spectators at His birth [Luke 2:13], who rejoiced at being privileged to see *God-in-the-Flesh* [1Tim 3:16]. These angels no doubt had to be restrained from their normal function²²⁶ - as Cyril of Jerusalem put it:

“Angels stood ready at hand, saying, *Let us burst their bands in sunder* [Ps 2.3], but they hold back, because their Lord willed to undergo it” [Catech 13.12].

The scene of the crucifixion was also crowded with spiritual enemies. David pictured these dark spiritual forces – physical & spiritual - as savage animals at the Cross:

“Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me *with* their mouths, *as* a ravening and a roaring lion” [Psalm 22:12-13].²²⁷

Paul refers to them less figuratively:

“Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world [τον αιωνα του κοσμου], according to the **prince** [τον αρχοντα] **of the power of the air**, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” [Eph 2:2].

Ultimately it was, the enemy that played into the hands of God:

“Which [mystery] none of the rulers of this world [των αρχοντων του αιωνος] hath known: for had they known it, they would not have **crucified** the Lord of glory.” [1Cor 2:8]

²²⁵ Compare Psalm 68:17 “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place”; 2Kings 6:17 “And Elisha prayed, and said, ‘LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes’ . . . and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha”; Psalm 91:11 “For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.”

²²⁶ Ps 35:17 “Lord, how long wilt thou look on? rescue my soul from their destructions, **my darling** from the lions”; Ps 60:5 “That **Thy Beloved** may be delivered; save *with* thy right hand, and hear me”; Jer 12:7 “I have left mine heritage; I have given the **dearly Beloved of My soul** into the hand of her enemies.”

²²⁷ Hence Eusebius (*Demonstrat.* x.2) understands Christ’s words, Ps. xxii. 12, “Many strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round,” of devils whom Christ saw, mocking Him on the cross as a criminal and wicked, and insulting Him for His crucifixion and impending death [“Here He clearly calls the evil powers bulls and calves, lions, dogs and unicorns, who hemmed Him in and surrounded (474) Him at the time of His Passion, but were not able to do aught against Him”]. Compare [Hab 3:5](#): “Burning coals” (*diabolus*) went forth at His feet,” Vg. The ancient fathers expound this verse of the destruction of death, and the devil, and his principalities, by Christ *upon the cross*; and the Targum is, “from before him was sent forth the angel of death, and his word went forth in a flame of fire;” cp. John, xiv. 30: “The prince of this world cometh, and he hath nothing in Me.”

Even the customary scorn heaped on Him by the Temple Hierarchy became another irony, as they literally – and verbally - fulfilled prophecy:

▣ Matt 27:39 And they that passed by reviled him, **wagging their heads....** 43 “He trusted in God; **let him deliver him** now, if he will have him: for he said, ‘I am the Son of God’.”

▣ “All they that saw me have laughed me to scorn: they have spoken with the lips, and **wagged the head**. ‘He trusted on the LORD *that* he would deliver him: **let him deliver him**, seeing he delighted in him’” [Psalm 22:7].

The scorn stopped abruptly at the onset of a *supernatural* celestial phenomenon:

“And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a **darkness** over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened” [Luke 23:44-45].

For Christians, it was the fulfillment of Prophecy:

“I will clothe the heavens with blackness” [Isa 50.3]; “And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord, that the sun shall GO DOWN at noon and the earth shall be dark in the clear day.” [Amos 8.9].

According to one account, “It was noon when darkness came over all Judaea: and they were troubled and distressed, as the sun had set while He was yet alive....And many went about with lamps supposing that it was night and fell down.”²²⁸ Compare Isaiah,

“We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men.” [59:10]

As death was closing in, Christ was still intent on accomplishing what was yet before Him. As Luke put it,

“And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, **he steadfastly set his face**²²⁹ to go to Jerusalem” Luke 9:51

He “set his face like a flint,” as in Isa 50:7. His resolution was such as to frighten His own disciples [Mark 10:32]. He was not merely yielding to the injustices inflicted upon him; he was determined to face them with His last breath:

“And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, **even the death of the cross**” [Php 2:8].

Just before expiring, Jesus begins a pathos-inspiring recitation of Psalm 22, in the Jewish manner of emphasizing the first and last verse, and intoning the others in a hushed breath. He is directing his followers to recognize his fulfillment of the Psalm as prophecy.

The pathos is heightened by the fact that, amid the business and noise of the spectacle, His words are misheard, and those close-by fail to recognize the significance. Only after the resurrection does the full significance become clear to His own disciples:

“**Eli, Eli – Lama Sabachthani**”²³⁰

Justin Martyr {*Dia. cum Trypho*} says the whole psalm is spoken of Christ; and Tertullian observes {*Adv. Judaeos* c. 10} that it contains the whole passion, all the sufferings of Christ. He continues . . .

▣ John 19:28 “After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, **that the scripture might be fulfilled**, saith, ‘I thirst.’”

▣ Ps 22:15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and **my tongue cleaveth** to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.

²²⁹ It is a Hebraistic idiom (nine times in Ezekiel), this use of face here, but the verb (effective aorist active) is an old one from *sthryzw* (from *sthrygx*, a support), to set fast, to fix. or “he prepared his face,” as the Syriac; or “turned his face,” as the Arabic, he looked that way, and set forward; or as the Persic version renders it, “he made a firm purpose.”

²³⁰ It is worthy of note, that a Hebrew MS. of *Matthew* of the twelfth century, instead of *yntbze azabthani* - “forsaken me,” reads *yntxkv shechachthani*, “FORGOTTEN me” as another mishearing of His words. CLARKE: This word makes a very good sense, and comes nearer to the *sabachthani* of the evangelists. It may be observed also, that the words, “Why hast thou FORGOTTEN me?” are often used by David and others, in times of oppression and distress. See Ps 42:9. A literal translation of the passage in the Syriac Testament gives a similar sense: *Ad quid dereliquisti me?* “To what hast thou abandoned me?” And an ancient copy of the old Itala version, a Latin translation before the time of St. Jerome, renders the words thus: *Quare me in opprobrium dedisti?* “Why hast thou abandoned me to reproach?” Some of the MSS. give the transliteration of these words from Ps 22:1 in the Hebrew (*Eli, Eli, lama Zaphthanei yntbze hml yla yla*). The Jews themselves own {*Toldos Jesu*, p. 17}, that these words were said by Jesus when he was in their hands. They indeed apply the passage to Esther; and say {*Bab. Megilia*, fol. 15. 2. & Gloss. in T. Bab. *Yoma*, fol. 29. 1}, that “she stood in the innermost court of the king’s house; and when she came to the house of the images, the Shekinah departed from her, and she said, “Eli, Eli, lama Azabthani?” my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

▣ Ps 69:21 . . . in **my thirst** they gave me **vinegar** to drink.

God prophetically prescribed that His “Suffering Servant” would drink “vinegar” - a most unlikely scenario for someone nailed to a cross, incapable of holding a cup. And yet, the fulfillment was prearranged, to overcome this:

John 19:29 “Now there was *set*²³¹ [i.e., ready & waiting] a vessel full of vinegar:²³² and they filled a sponge with vinegar,…”

A sponge circumvented the need for a cup, but introduced a new hurdle: how to get it to Christ's mouth. Overcoming this hurdle introduces yet another level of prophetic symbolism.

“...and put it upon *hyssop*, and put it to his mouth”

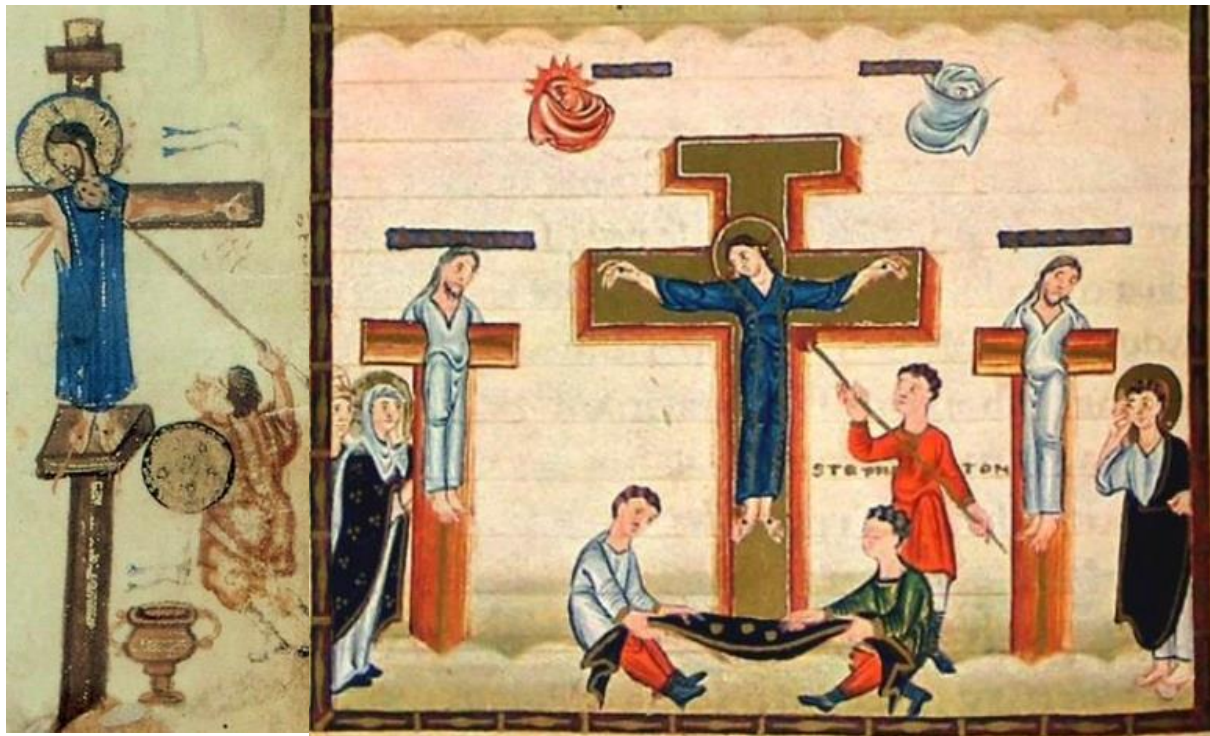
Some of these sponges had leather handles to them [m. *Sabbat* 21.3], but John as an eye-witness at the cross, specifically notes the use of “hyssop”²³³ [John 19:29] to elevate the sponge to Jesus mouth, for its paschal significance [Ex 12:22,²³⁴ 1Cor 5:7].

²³¹Robertson: “*Was set* (ἐκείτο). Imperfect middle. John, as eyewitness, had noticed it there.” From κεῖμαι, lit. “to lie outstretched,” connotatively, “*appointed*.” The Jewish *Toldos Jesu*, p.17 claims that Jesus said, ‘give me a little water to drink,’ but confirm that they gave him חֲמִץ חָזָק, “sharp vinegar.”

²³²“In a place near at hand”, as Nonnus observes; for the sake of them that were crucified, either to refresh their spirits, or stop a too great effusion of blood, that they might continue the longer in their misery, and for the use of the soldiers who crucified, vinegar being part of the allowance of Roman soldiers (Julian. Imperator. *Epist.* 27. p. 161. Vid. Lydium *de re militari*, l.6. c. 7. p. 245) What they used to drink: sometimes it was mixed with water; which mixed liquor they called “Posca”

{Salmuth. in *Panciroll. rerum memorab.* par. 1. Tit. 53. p. 274}, and was what even their generals sometimes used; as Scipio, Metellus, Trajan, Hadrian, et al
²³³the Ethiopic version has both, “they filled a sponge with vinegar, and it was set round with hyssop, and they bound it upon a reed”; and so some have thought that a bunch of hyssop was stuck round about the sponge of vinegar, which was fastened to the top of a reed [Matt 27:48]; and the words will bear to be rendered; “setting it about with hyssop.” The hyssop with the Jews was not reckoned among herbs, but trees; see [1Kings 4:33] and they speak {*Mishnah Parah*, c. 11. sect. 8. Maimon. *Hilch. Parah Adumah*, c. 11. sect. 7} of hyssop which they gather Myuel, “for wood”; the stalks of which therefore must have been of some size. We are told {*Arabes Lexicograph.* apud de Dieu *Animadversiones Sive Commentarius In quatuor Evangelia in loc*}, it grew in great plenty upon the mountains about Jerusalem, and that its branches were almost a cubit long. Josephus {*De Bello Jud.* 6.3.4} makes mention of a village beyond Jordan called Bethzob, which, as he says, signifies the house of hyssop; perhaps so called from the large quantity of hyssop that grew near it:

²³⁴Clarke: “we find it frequently used in the Old Testament in rites of purification” It was used for cleansing lepers (Lev. xiv. 49ff), also in the sin-offering and in the sprinkling of the water of purification (Num. xix. 2ff, Heb 9:19); Ps 51:7 Purge me with *hyssop*, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Hyssop was given, because it is frequently used with wine and vinegar (see Columella, *de Re Rust.* xii. 35; and Pliny, *N. H.* xiv. 16). It has reviving, and strengthening, and other medicinal properties.



The sponge & vinegar vessel, as depicted in the *Chludov Psalter* 7th century illuminated

Among art historians and iconographers, the sponge-bearer is known as “Stephaton,” after the name given in the *Codex Egberti* miniature [above²³⁵]; probably a corruption of “Ctesiphon” - whom according to Spanish tradition converted to Christianity after his experience at the cross, and became a disciple and co-worker of the Apostle James bar Zebedee.²³⁶

Unlike the initial offer of a pain-numbing mixture, Christ is offered something for reinvigoration. This He takes in preparation for His final act. Vinegar was also used Biblically for drink, as appears in Ruth 2:14 and “dip thy morsel in the vinegar,” which Boaz’s reapers had with themselves in the field,²³⁷ for which reason the soldiers here offer it to Christ.

The sponge would also serve a more gruesome purpose: sopping up the blood²³⁸ of Christ, as required by Jewish burial regulations and ritual.²³⁹

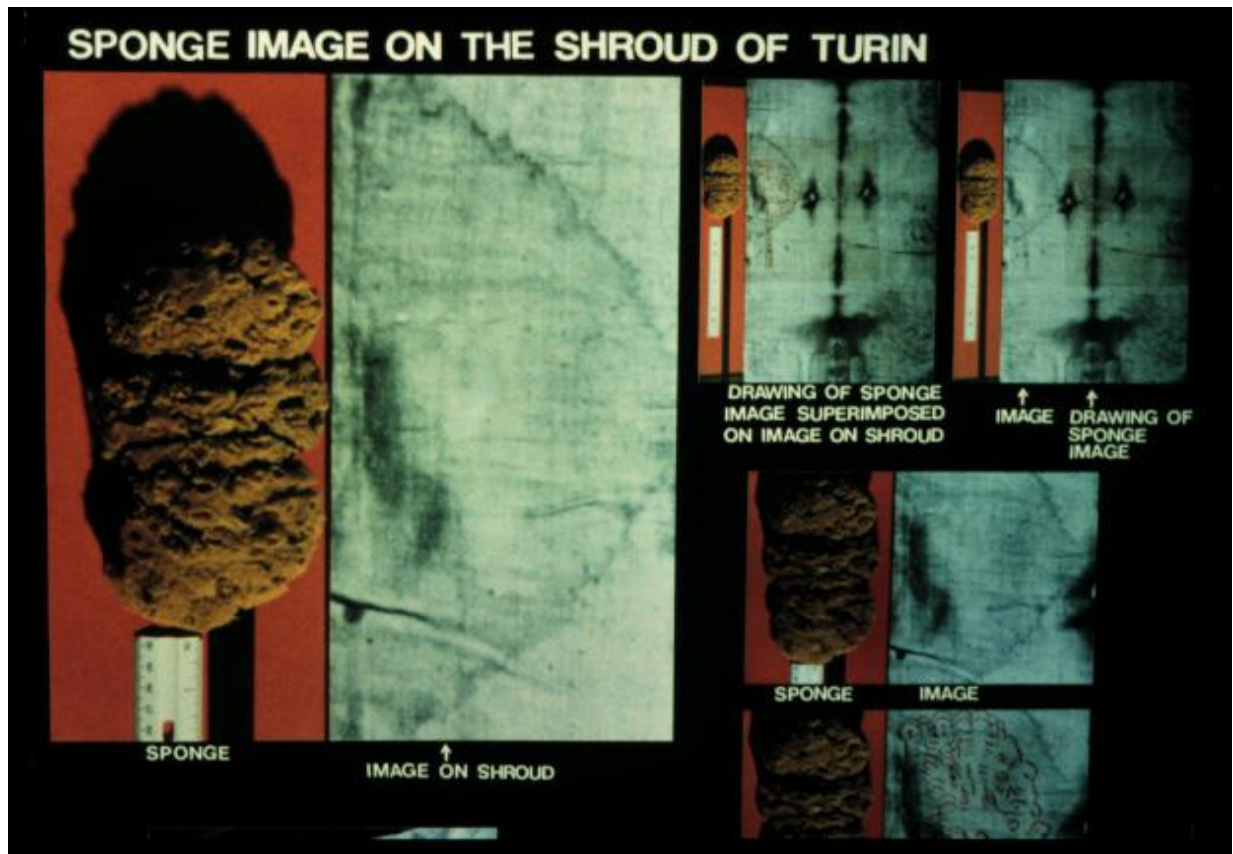
²³⁵ And Ivory carving from AD 1100 O. Wulff’s *DIE ALTCHRISTLICHEN UND MITTELALTERLICHEN BYZANTINISCHEN UND ITALIENISCHEN BILDWERKE* [Berlin 1923, pp.72,589]. See also M. R. de Lasteyrie *Gazette archéologique*, p. 101, pi. XVII, 1883 re: 12th cent plaque in the Louvre identifying STEFATON; also a fresco in the Saint-Remy-la-Varenne from the same era identifying STEPHATON.

²³⁶ In late Spanish tradition he is identified as “disciple”, “amanuensis Ctesiphon Ebnathar, an Arab” [Granada: *Memories, Adventures, Studies and Impressions - Page 32* by Leonard Williams (1906); cf *Chapters from the Religious History of Spain Connected with the Inquisition - Page 109* by Henry Charles Lea (1890); in Emmerich’s *Dolorous Passion*, he is called “Abenadar” [=Ebnathar] who took the Christian name Ctesiphon and became an evangelist. He returned to Spain in the time of Nero as one of the “*siete varones apostólicos*” who were martyred for their evangelism. This group includes Torquatus, Caecilius, Ctesiphon, Euphrasius, Indaletius, Hesychius, and Secundus; the seven saints are mentioned in the *Martyrology of Usuard* [c.858], *Martyrology of Lyon* (806 AD, incorporating text from 5th century sources), and the Mozarabic liturgy [5-6th cent], being [re]commissioned as bishops of Spain by Peter & Paul from Rome.

²³⁷ “because of the heat” as the Jewish commentators point out (e.g. Jarchi, Aben Ezra *in loco*)

²³⁸ Vinegar was also used for stopping blood (Pliny *Nat. Hist.* l. 31. c. 11), when it flowed from wounds in a large quantity; and of the same use were sponges; hence Tertullian mentions *spongias retiariorum* [*De Spectaculis* c. 25], the sponges of the fencers, which they had with them to stop any effusion of blood that should be made in their exercises. Hyssop was given, because it is frequently used with wine and vinegar (see Columella, *de Re Rust.* xii. 35; and Pliny, *N. H.* xiv. 16). It has reviving, and strengthening, and other medicinal properties.

²³⁹ St. Gregory of Tours speaks of the holy sponge, as a relic publicly venerated at Jerusalem (together with the crown of thorns, the spear, and the reed). Later transported to the Upper Room of the Constantinian Basilica in 612, where *Sophronius* witnessed it. Though a piece of the Holy Sponge, brown with blood, is preserved in Rome in the *Basilica di San Giovanni in Laterano* and in Notre Dame, the greater portion’s final resting place is in the Chapel of the Relics at *Santa Croce in Gerusalemme*



Christ finishes his recitation of Psalm 22:

▣ When, therefore, he had received the vinegar, Jesus said “**It is accomplished!**” And, bowing his head, delivered up His Spirit. [John 19:30]

▣ Psalm 22:31 They shall come and shall **declare** his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that “**he hath accomplished it.**”

With the quotation of Ps 31:5 (as recorded in Lu 23:46, "Father, 'into thy hands I commend my spirit'"²⁴⁰), Christ “yielded up the ghost” [αφηκε το πνευμα, “He **dismissed** the spirit,” Matt 27:50]. That is, He willingly gave up that life which was impossible for man to take away.

“It is not said that he hung on the cross till he died through pain and agony; nor is it said that his bones were broken, the sooner to put him out of pain, and to hasten his death; but that [He] himself dismissed the soul, that He might thus become, not a forced sacrifice, but a free-will offering for sin” [CLARKE on Matt 27:50].

²⁴⁰ “For that which is sent forth (*emittitur*) is voluntary, that which is lost (*amittitur*) is of necessity,” S. Ambrose (*in Luc.* xxiii.)

"He gave up his life because he willed it, when he willed it, and as he willed it" (Augustine *de Trin.* iv. 13).

Or as Christ Himself put it:

"Therefore doth my Father love me, because *I* lay down my life, that I might take it again. **No man taketh it from me**, but *I* lay it down of myself. *I* have power to lay it down,"²⁴¹ and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father" [Joh 10:17-18].

For this "spectacular" crucifixion, no extravagance had been spared, even though as Athanasius noted:

"Thus by what seems His utter poverty and weakness on the Cross He *overturns* the pomp and parade of idols" [*On the Incarnation* 1].

An early 3rd century writer reported in *De duobus montibus Sina et Sion*:

The Father made the sky open up and thunders have been made unbearable, the earth quaked, the tombs have been opened up, and he put bodies outside by themselves, the veil of the temple has been split and by so much breaking of the sky and quaking of the earth, everybody who was standing before the timber, some weeping, others even blaspheming, mocking, *laying face down as if they were going to be dead*. Then the Jews understood that they offended the Lord, and they had turned to grief and bitterness. For in this time which he hanged nailed on the timber, there have been the days of the Unleavened Bread which are the holidays of the Jews; in this day the dreadful earthquake and the breaking of the sky occurred; face down on the earth crying they have turned to grief and, in this passion of his he fulfilled the prophetic word: "*and I will turn their holiday into grief and their song into a lamentation*" [Am 8:10].²⁴²

²⁴¹ S. Thomas says (*par.* iii. q. 47) that Christ preserved the vigour and strength of His body to the last;

²⁴² http://docs.google.com/Doc?id=dhmv9cqq_1c98gtu; Maria Laato, *Jews and Christians in De duobus montibus Sina et Sion: an approach to early Latin Adversus Iudaeos literature* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 1998) "On the basis of its eschatological, apocalyptic character, Laato dates the text to the time of Tertullian, in any case no later than ca. 250"

Chapter 4

When the global darkness descended around noon [Matt 27:45, Mark 15:33, Luke 23:44], the plans and preparations for the Passover celebration had been thrown into a quandary:

“And they were troubled and in an agony lest the sun should have set, for that he [Jesus] yet lived: for it is written for them **that the sun should not set**²⁴³ **upon him that hath been slain** [Deu 21:23]. (*Gosp.Pet.* 5:15-16)²⁴⁴



Highly artistic Carolingian ivory [Musée du Louvre OA6000], with dynamic rendering of the *crurifragium* [lower register]

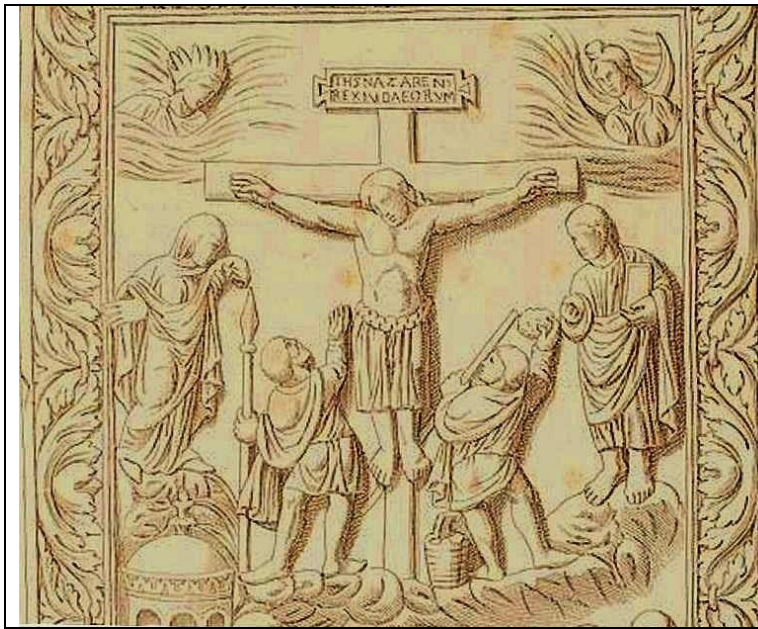
The request for an early *crurifragium* was an idiosyncrasy that their Roman conquerors accommodated. Though usually treated as a form of punishment in itself, within Judea, it became a form of expediting the death,²⁴⁵ and even foreshortening the pain.²⁴⁶ God had given a command 1500 years earlier that would force the fulfillment of two more prophecies regarding the Messiah.

²⁴³ Compare Wagenseil *Toledoth Jeshu*: —And *when even was come* the wise men said, We may not, on account of the Fatherless, break the letter of the law (which forbids that one who is hung should remain all night on the tree). Though he may have set at naught the law, yet will not we.; —His body shall not remain all **night** upon the **tree**, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged [is] accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee [for] an inheritance. I **Deu 21:23**; Strassburg *TJ*: “When they had let him hang **until the time of afternoon prayer** [About three o'clock.] **they took him down from the tree**, for so it is written: **His body shall not remain all night upon the tree**, etc. They buried him”

²⁴⁴ Also, 3:5 And Herod said: Brother Pilate, even if none had begged for him, we should have buried him, since also the Sabbath dawneth; for it is written in the law that *the sun should not set upon one that hath been slain*

²⁴⁵ cf. Lactantius, iv. 26, 'His executioners did not think it necessary to break His bones, *as was their prevailing custom*'

²⁴⁶ 'One of the malefactors reproached them, saying, _We have suffered this for the evils that we have done, but this man having become the Saviour of men, what wrong hath He done to you? And they, being angered at him, commanded that his [Jesus'] legs should **not** be broken, **that he might die in torment**' (see Robinson and James, *Gospel and Revelation of Peter*; also the edd. by Swete (p. 7)



Byzantine-era “Passion” ivory engraving, with the apostle John [right] observing the events with tablet in hand [as if recording his testimony]. Mary [left], is pleading with guard that Christ, already dead, has no need for his legs to be broken.

John’s eye-witness account reveals the poignant observation that Christ was fully conscious and articulate, up until the moment of death, at which point “He said, ‘It is finished’ - and bowing His head, He gave up His Spirit” [John 19:31]. At that point, John would have quickly informed the Sanhedrin observers, who in turn would have had Joseph of Arimathea appropriate a *sudarium* for Christ, while He was still on the cross.

In Jewish custom, as John Gill puts it, the use of the *sudarium*

“was not only to tie up the chin and jaws, but to hide the grim and ghastly looks of a dead corpse; and one of the same price and value was used by rich and poor.”²⁴⁷

A cloth is known to be associated with Christ’s burial from the gospel of John 20:6-7.

▣ "Simon Peter, following him, also came up, went into the tomb, saw the linen cloth lying on the ground, and also the cloth [σουδαριον] that had been over his head; this was not with the linen cloth but rolled up in a place by itself."

²⁴⁷ According to the Talmud, “formerly they used to uncover the faces of the rich, and cover the faces of the poor, because their faces were black through want, and the poor were ashamed; wherefore they ordered, that they should cover the faces of all, for the honor of the poor” [TB *Moed Katon* 27a]. Maimonides specifies “the wise men introduced a custom of using רדו (= *sudar*[ium]) of the same value, not exceeding a penny,²⁴⁷ that he might not be ashamed who had not one so good as another; and they cover the faces of the dead, that they might not shame the poor, whose faces were black with famine.” [Hilchot *Ebel*, c. 4. sect. 1] The first step was to fasten it to the back of the head and ponytail with sharp instruments (pins of bone or something similar). The *Oviedo* cloth shows that all the area it touched was completely covered in blood **BEFORE BLOOD CAME OUT OF THE DEAD BODY**. “The blood that flows at the time of death may not be washed away. When there is other blood on the body that flowed during lifetime (while alive), from wounds or as a result of an operation, the washing and *taharah* (purification) are performed in the usual manner” [The Jewish Way of Death and Mourning by Maurice Lamm (1969)].

The word *soudarion*, rendered "napkin" in the *King James Version*, is thought to be originally Latin,²⁴⁸ and signifies an handkerchief, with which the sweat is wiped off the face.²⁴⁹

According to history, the *Sudarium* was in Palestine until shortly before the year 614, when Jerusalem was attacked and conquered by Chosroes II, who was king of Persia from 590-628. It was taken away to avoid destruction in that invasion, first to Alexandria by the presbyter Philip, then across the north of Africa when Chosroes conquered Alexandria in 616. The *Sudarium* entered Spain at Cartagena, along with people who were fleeing from the Persians.²⁵⁰

The 6th century *Georgian Chronicle* preserves the testimony of Saint Nino of Georgia (c AD 330), whose mother Susanna [sister of the Patriarch of Jerusalem], informs us:

"Now they did not find the *Sudarium*, but it is said to have been found by Peter, who took it and kept it, but we know not if it has ever been discovered."

Syrian exegete Isho'dad of Merv confirms this in his *Commentary on the Gospels*:

"But the *Sudura* (= *Sudarium*) Simeon [Peter] took, and it remained with him, that it might be a crown on his head. And whenever he made an ordination, *he arranged it on his head* ... just as even ... bishops of the Church arrange the turbans that are on their heads . . . in place of that *Sudarium*."

The liturgy for the Saturday after Easter in the *Mozarabic Rite* [from 6th c. Spain] has the following:

"Peter ran with John to the tomb and *saw the recent imprints of the dead and risen man on the linens*."

²⁴⁸ Nonnus says *sudarium* was a common word with the Syrians, and the word *ardwo* is used in the Syriac version. In his paraphrase of John's Gospel, Nonnus renders *soudariw* as *kefalthv zwsthra*, "the girdle (or binding) of the head" - for with this the head and face of the dead person were bound

²⁴⁹ e.g., as used in Acts 19:12, "So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs [*soudaria*] or aprons"

²⁵⁰ The history of the *Sudarium* is well documented, and much more straightforward than that of the Shroud. Most of the information comes from the twelfth century bishop of Oviedo, Pelagius (or Pelayo), whose historical works are the *Book of the Testaments of Oviedo*, and the *Chronicon Regum Legionensium*.

In fact, the apostle Peter is depicted holding the *sudarium* while receiving the scroll of the New Covenant from Christ on the famous Lateran Sarcophagus, which may be as old as the reign of Septimus Severus²⁵¹ [AD 193-211]:



We know that it remained in the “Holy Land” for the first 6 centuries of the Christian Era from the testimony of the “Piacenza Pilgrim,”²⁵² quoting Antoninus before AD 570:

“There is a cave on the bank of the Jordan The *sudarium* that covered Jesus head is known to be here.”



²⁵¹ De Rossi remarks that the grace and refinement of the faces of our Lord and the Apostles would incline us to ascribe this work to the age of Septimius Severus [r. 193 to 211]; Friedrich Sickler, *Almanach aus Rom*. Vol 1, 1810, pp. 173-174, actually assigns to it that date.

²⁵² A block of marble found at [Elateia](#), inscribed in Byzantine Greek "This stone is from Kana in in Galilee, where Our Lord Jesus Christ turned the water into wine" and the further inscription "Antoninus", was identified with Antoninus of Poacenza when the block was moved to the Chapel of Saint Eleutherios near the Cathedral, Athens. ("Archaeological News", *The American Journal of Archaeology and of the History of the Fine Arts* 1885:230. The key date in the history of the *sudarium* is the 14th March 1075, when the chest was officially opened in the presence of King Alfonso VI, his sister Doña Urraca, and Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, better known as El Cid. A list was made of the relics that were in the chest, and which included the *sudarium*. In the year 1113, the chest was covered with silver plating, on which there is an inscription inviting all Christians to venerate this relic which contains the holy blood. The *Sudarium* has been kept in the cathedral at Oviedo ever since.

Then,

“Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable counsellor, who also himself was waiting for the reign of God, came, boldly entered in unto Pilate, and asked the body of Jesus. And Pilate wondered if he were already dead, and having called near the centurion,²⁵³ did question him if he were long dead; and having known *it* from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph.” [Mark 15:43 *Young’s*]

This verification process²⁵⁴ took ~1 hour, during which Christ was hooded on the Cross with His *sudarium*. Even after death, He continued to fulfill Messianic prophecy:

“But, one of the soldiers, with a spear, **pierced his side**, and there came out, straightway, blood and water.²⁵⁵ And, he that hath seen, hath borne witness; and genuine is his testimony, and he knoweth that he saith what is true, that ye also may believe” [John 19:34-35]

²⁵³ *Itala* MS adds: —And when Pilate heard that he was dead, he *glorified God and* gave the body to Joseph.† Cp. Apocryphal *Acta Pilati* 11: And **the centurion reported** what had happened to the procurator. And when the procurator and his wife heard it, they were exceedingly grieved, and neither ate nor drank that day.†

²⁵⁴ The centurion here spoken of is the one who, according to Roman custom, presided over the execution (hence called by Seneca *centurio supplicio præpositus*; Tacitus, *exactor mortis Annales* 3.14, 11.37; cp Livy *Hist* 2.5.5 *exactor supplicii*; Seneca *de Ire* 1.18.4 *centurio supplicio præpositus*)

²⁵⁵ Ambrose, Augustin, and Chrysostom, make the blood an emblem of the *eucharist*, and the water an emblem of *baptism*.



The ancient Syriac *Transitus Mariae* records the burial and subsequent hiding of the Lance with the other “relics of the Passion” in the 1st century. The *Breviarus de Hierosolyma* of AD 530 reports that pilgrims could still see the lance, (recovered by St Helena in the 4th century) still kept in the *Basilica of Constantine* at Jerusalem. An similar account is found in the *De terra Sancta*. IV of Theodosius (circa 530, Tobler and Molinier, I, 64). In 570, Antony, the martyr, saw the lance in the basilica of Sion. Arculf, about 670, also testifies that he saw the spear with which the soldier pierced the side of Christ. According to him the spear was fixed in a wooden cross in the portico of Constantine's basilica, its shaft being broken into two parts.

While merely a procedural certification of death for the Romans, the piercing was a profound testimony of Christ’s accursed state for the Jews. They watched as on the “abominated tree” [Isa 14:19] he was “thrust through”²⁵⁶ [or “pierced”], as a completion of the defilement. And yet by “being made the curse” [Gal 3:13], He set the stage for yet future fulfillment of prophecy.

²⁵⁶ The word Nej ta'an rendered "thrust through," is only used in this place; but, as the several Jewish commentators before mentioned observe {*Seder Olam Rabba* c. 28. fol. 81, Aben Ezra, Jarchi, Kimchi, and Abendana} in the Arabic language it signifies to pierce or thrust through with sword or spear {"confodit cum instrumentis, hasta, gladiis," Castel. col. 1546. So it is used in the Arabic version of **Lam.** iv. 9. and in the Chaldee language it signifies to pierce through and wound; as in the *Targum* on **Jer.** li. 4), and so it is used in the Arabic version of **John** 19:34,37

“For these things were done that the scripture might be fulfilled: *You shall not break a bone of him.*²⁵⁷ And again another scripture saith: *They shall look on him whom they pierced.* [John 19:36-37]

“And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have **pierced**, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for *his* only son” [Zech 12:10].

“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they *also* which **pierced** him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen” [Rev 1:7].

“Then the Jews and the elders and the priests, realizing the great evil they had done to their own harm, began to lament and to say ‘Woe on our sins, the judgment, and the end of Jerusalem has drawn nigh.’²⁵⁷

After the Resurrection, the significance of the piercing became clear to believers. Christ’s piercing had coincided with the slaying and spilling of the Passover lamb’s blood in the Temple.²⁵⁸ Chrysostom (writing in AD 387,²⁵⁹ commenting on 1Cor 5:7), wrote that the Crucifixion fulfils the Mosaic ordinance that the lamb should be sacrificed between the evenings²⁶⁰ on the 14th of Nisan. In, this he only is affirming the teaching of the apostolic and church fathers²⁶¹ who saw the crucifixion and piercing in light of Rev 5:6:

²⁵⁷ Preserved in the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* but based on even earlier traditions as evidenced independently by the *Doctrine of Addai* and Ephrem Syrus’ commentary on Lk23.48, Old Syriac and Old Latin[g1]; cf *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* f.135(v). The Persian version reads, “they went back, and kneeled down, and prostrated themselves to the ground” [Gill, loc.cit.]

²⁵⁸ “The regular afternoon sacrifices at the Temple is offered an hour earlier than usual and at about three o’clock the people begin the slaughtering of the [Passover] sacrifice” – *The Jewish Festivals* by Hayyim Schauss, pg 53

²⁵⁹ The date is secure, even though the writing is classified as pseudo-Chrysostom, among other contemporary but anonymous writers grouped together with the writings of Chrysostom [ed. Bened. via. App. p. 281].

²⁶⁰ The Hebrew phrase *beyn ha'arbayim* (בין הערבים) is translated as “in the evening” in the KJV; literal translation of this expression is “between the evenings,” and occurs Exo. 12:6; 16:12; 29:39; 29:41; 30:8; Lev. 23:5; Num. 9:3, 5, 11; 28:4, 8; the time the Jews call “between the two evenings,” which they say {T.Hieros *Pesachim* fol. 31.3} is “from the sixth hour, and onwards”

²⁶¹ Claudius Apollinaris of Hierapolis, c. AD 180, Clement of Alexandria on *the Passover*, Julius Africanus, (*Chronicon*, fr. 50 ap. Routh, *Rel. Sac.* ii. 297), Epiphanius, *Haer.* L.2, Hilarianus (A.D. 397 : *de die paschas et mensis* xv, ap. Gallandi, viii. 748), and the definite testimony from lost writings of three ‘holy Fathers of the Church,’ quoted in the *Paschal Chronicle* (A.D. 641 : ed. Ducange, pp. 6, 7), all support that Christ was crucified at the same time the paschal Lamb were being sacrificed in the Temple

“And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a **Lamb** as it had been **slain.**”

The early church went to great lengths to make this connection explicit, even showing a lamb instead of Christ in crucifixion scenes:



5th century S. Marcos Ciborium Column Sculpture

John, gives us an important clue with forensic significance: “a spear pierced His [right²⁶²] side, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water” [19:34].

- ▣ 1) Water and blood suggests a *post-mortem* separation of serum and blood.
- ▣ 2) The “suddenness” suggests the contents were under pressure, at least 1500cc.

Only a hemothorax²⁶³ could satisfy these 2 criteria. As Dr. Cinquemani points out:

²⁶² Christian art has consistently depicted Christ as pierced on the right side, and as certain manuscripts and versions of John 19:34 add “[right] side”

“Initially, only blood poured out from the wound. The subsequent flow of serum shows that the whole pleural cavity was full.”

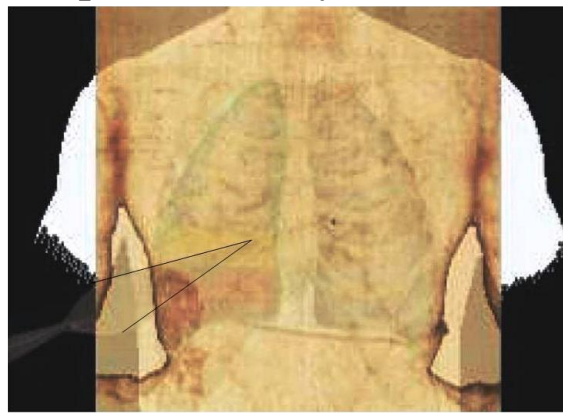
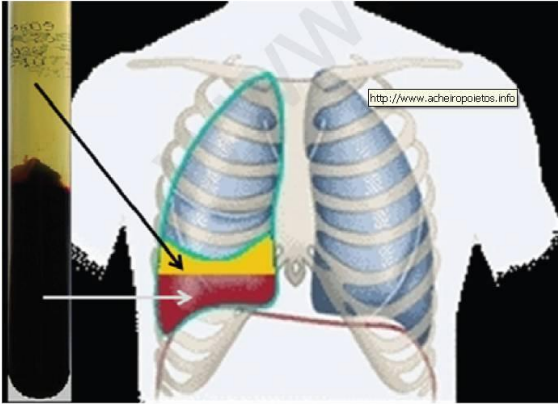
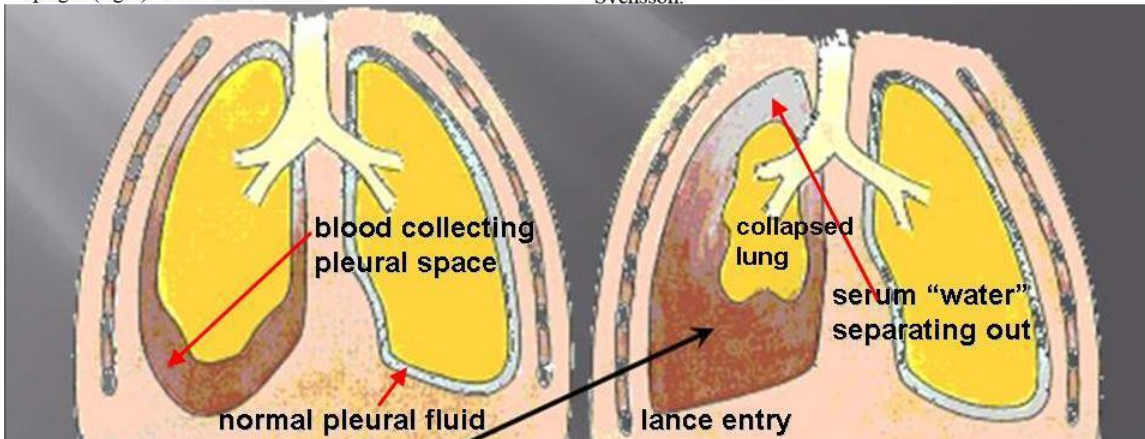
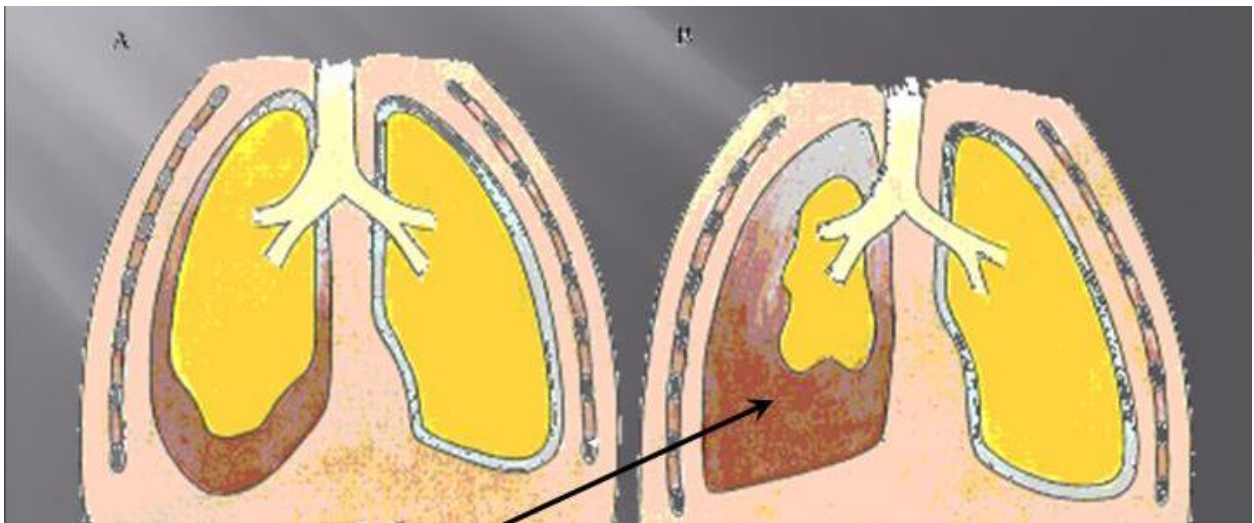


Figure 8a. Left: a test tube with blood one hour after sampling. The blood has separated into serum and blood corpuscle layers. This separation of whole blood also takes place after death in the lung sac, if the body is placed upright (right). © Niels Svensson.

Figure 8b. The side wound of the TSM (inversed) has been superimposed figure 8a in order to show the anatomic place of the wound. A lancea shows the place and direction of the thrust. The blood will pour out in cascades. © Niels Svensson.



The significance should not have been lost on the Jewish spectators, based on their traditional understanding of Scripture



²⁶³ Cause is usually traumatic, from a blunt or penetrating injury to the [thorax](#), resulting in a rupture of the [serous membrane](#) either lining the thorax or covering the [lungs](#). This rupture allows blood to spill into the pleural space, equalizing the pressures between it and the lungs. Blood loss may be massive in people with these conditions, as each side of the thorax can hold 30–40% of a person's blood volume.

▣ “Moses smote **the rock** twice, at the first time amda tpyja, ‘blood dropped out’; and at the second time abundance of waters flowed out.” [*Targ. of Jonathan*, Num 20:11; *Shemot Rabba*, 3.94.1. *Zohar in Num.* fol. 102.4]

The apostle Paul alludes to this tradition when he says:

▣ “And [the Israelites] did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink [cp **John 6:55**]: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ” [1Cor 10:11].

Both the Shroud & Sudarium were essential in Jewish burial as means of ensuring all the blood of the deceased was retrieved for burial with the body,²⁶⁴ since “the life [נֶפֶשׁ=soul] of the flesh is in the blood” [Lev 17:11,14].

When Christ refers to “*my blood*, which is *shed for you*” [Luke 22:20], it was the fulfillment of Job’s prophetic words:

“now *my soul is poured out* upon me; the days of affliction have taken hold upon me” [Job 30:16], “because he hath *poured out his soul* unto death” [Isa 53:12].

This was the blood from the Body of Christ that was presented in the heavenly sanctuary [Heb 9:12] for the purging of our conscience [Heb 9:14]. So precious was this blood to the early Church, because it is only “the blood of Jesus His Son [that] continues to cleanse us from every sin” [1John 1:7, Williams’].

Universal tradition asserts that the blood of the Paschal lamb was sprinkled upon the lintels and door posts, on the eve of the Passover in Egypt, in the form of a cross, anticipating the three crosses on Calvary. Even into the 19th and early 20th century,

²⁶⁴ “...the blood of a person is considered as holy as his life and deserves proper burial” [*How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household* Blu Greenberg (Fireside, 1983)]. This custom is still perpetuated in modern Israel, with victims of terrorism, etc. Israel’s ZAKA (Disaster Victims’ Identification) members not only collect body parts, but every drop of blood from the victims [see *DIGNITY BEYOND DEATH* Rochel U. Berman & Foreword by Rabbi Irving Greenberg, 2005]

“At Corfu, we observed the doors of the Jews marked on the doorposts and lintels with the blood of the paschal lamb; and the mark was always made **in the shape of the Cross** (The Jews of Daghistan beneath the Circassian mountains are said to be the only ones who sacrifice the proper paschal lamb).” - *F. W. Faber*²⁶⁵

“In one village near Jerusalem I have seen many houses with the blood thus sprinkled on the doorposts,...In two or three mixed hamlets (Moslems and Christians) with which I am acquainted, the Christians, either just before Lent or at Easter, kill a goat or sheep, and put the blood on the upper lintel in the form of a cross, and on the side-posts in spots.” - *Charles Thomas Wilson*²⁶⁶

The futility of this exercise was demonstrated by God the Father (as we have seen), when the Temple Hierarchy rejected the shed blood of the “Lamb of God” (although foreshadowed by the Passover & prophesied by John the Baptist, John 1:29). When they would not apply His Son’s blood to the lintel and doorpost of the soul (though sin lay crouching at their doorstep, Gen 1:7), the Father fulfilled Amos 9.1:

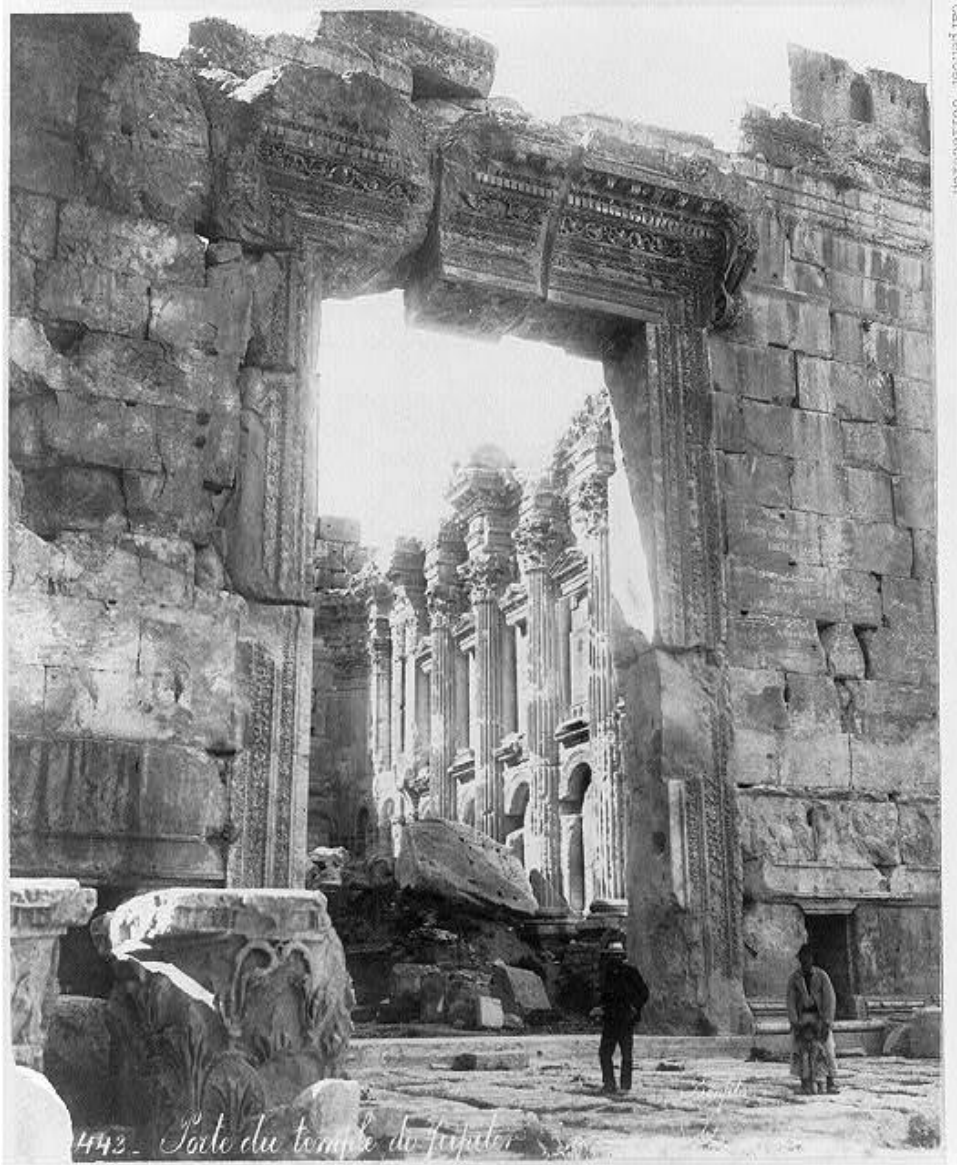
“I saw the Lord standing upon the altar: and he said, **Smite the lintel**²⁶⁷ of the door, that **the posts may shake!**”²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ *Sights and Thoughts in Foreign Churches*, v. 1 – [1842], p. 399; “At Corfu the cross was inscribed with a lock of the lamb’s wool dipped in its blood.” C.K. Tuckerman, *The Greeks of To-day*. [G. P. Putnam & sons, 1872], p. 309

²⁶⁶ [Peasant life in the Holy Land - Page 22](#) [1906]

²⁶⁷ Jerome, ON MATTHEW 4; epistle 120, to Hedibia: *Gospel of the Hebrews*: a lintel of the temple of infinite magnitude was broken and divided; the lintel of the temple, of marvelous magnitude, fell.

²⁶⁸ Isaiah 6.4 “And the **lintel** shook at the voice they uttered, and the house was filled with smoke.” Was seen by the Church fathers as a foreshadowing of the Crucifixion: Jerome *epis.* xviii; cf Chrys in Isa 6.4, CyrJ in Isa 6.4



The Baalbek Temple of Jupiter, exhibiting earthquake damage typical for large monolithic lintels

The incident of the piercing itself was displayed historically in Christian art, based on the records of Pilate's report.²⁶⁹ One of the details preserved was the name of the soldier that pierced Christ:

²⁶⁹ These circulated prior to Maximinus' persecution [starting on AD 303], during which these documents were burned, and hostile forgeries substituted through out the empire. [Eusebius *Church History* 9.5,7] Transcripts of the trials of Christian martyrs through the first three centuries show them appealing to Pilate's report often enough to cause great consternation to earlier persecutors See Bell Deighton, *The persecution of Diocletian: a historical essay* [Harvard University, 1876], for extensive transcripts and documentation



To the right, in the 10th century Codex Egberti, "Longinus" is identified between the other *tortores*, wielding mallets in the process of *crurifragium* against the *latrones* ["robbers"]. To the right, "Longinus" is identified in Greek script on the Rabbula Gospel codex of AD 568.

In fact, Christian Art itself is a storehouse of early Church teaching and historical tradition. For example, the famous *Utrecht Psalter* (a 9th century manuscript based on much early archetypes²⁷⁰), supplies a running Christological "commentary" on the psalms, not with words, but by illustration. We find the text of Psalm 116 juxtaposed with this image:



²⁷⁰ Meyer Schapiro [Selected Papers, volume 3, Late Antique, Early Christian and Mediaeval Art. Chatto & Windus, London, 1980] is among those who have proposed that the Psalter copied illustrations from a Late Antique manuscript; apart from an original perhaps of the 4th or 5th centuries.

To the right of the cross are the Virgin and St. John, and to the left is the psalmist,²⁷¹ clad in a loin-cloth, holding the “cup of salvation” (116:13) in one hand, with which he is receiving the blood from the side of Christ.

In the other hand, he holds a paten with the '*hostia*'²⁷² in fulfillment of verse 17:

“I will offer to thee the sacrifice *of thanksgiving*, and will call upon the name of the LORD” (116:17).

In other versions of the crucifixion, we see a female figure (representing) the Church capturing the Blood in a eucharistic vessel, in a similar manner:



Here we see a mixture of the symbolic and the historical in the early church, following the lead of scripture:

“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints” [Psa 116:15](#)]

Female patrons did in fact collect vials of the shed blood of martyrs, to be kept alongside their catacomb tombs.

²⁷¹ There is no superscription to the psalm in the Masoretic or Septuagint text, but the Syriac version attributes it to David

²⁷² “sacrifice of thanksgiving” = *hostiam laudis* [Vg] = “host of the eucharist”



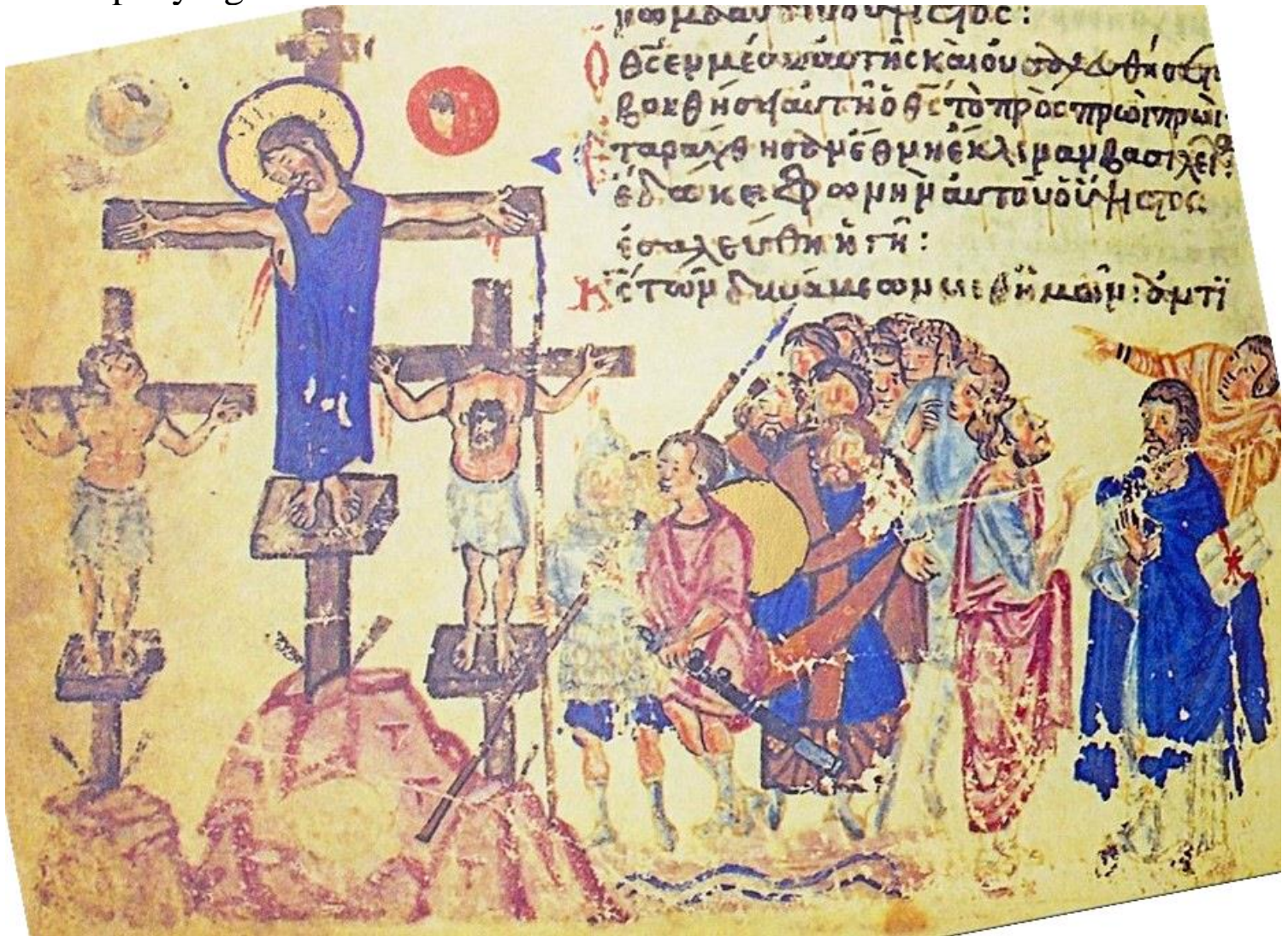
In other depictions, this symbolic role is given to Joseph of Arimathea, as in the ivory engraving to the right [Victoria & Albert collection; c. 1050, Köln], giving rise to the Grail Romances [see Robert de Boron's 12th cent. *Joseph d'Arimathe*²⁷³]. The notice in the Georgian *Joseph Apocryphon*²⁷⁴ from c.400, accurately describes the 1st century practice: "I [Joseph] climbed Holy Golgotha, where the Lord's Cross stood, and I collected in...the large shroud the precious blood that had flowed from His holy side."

After Pilate had certification of Jesus death from the *centurio supplicio praepositus*, [Mark 15:45] the entombment "spectacle" could begin. A

²⁷³ Robert de Boron is the first author to give the [Holy Grail](#) myth an explicitly [Christian](#) dimension. According to him, [Joseph of Arimathea](#) used the Grail (the [Last Supper](#) vessel) to catch the last drops of blood from [Jesus's](#) body as he hung on the cross. Joseph's family brought the Grail to the *vaus d'Avaron*, the valleys of Avaron in the west.. Robert de Boron's version of this event simply substitutes the Grail for the shroud

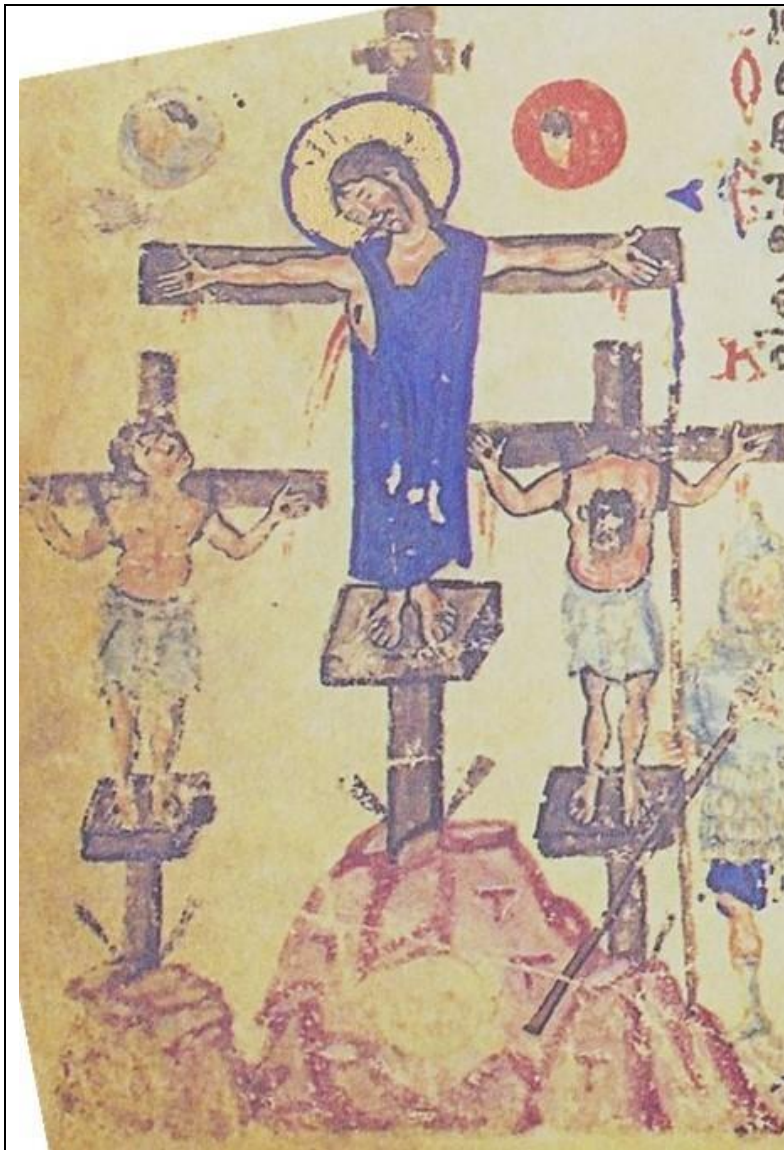
²⁷⁴ Par. 16 [Adolf Harnack, "Ein in georgischer Sprache überliefertes Apokryphon des Joseph von Arimathea," *SPAW* 39 (1901): 920-31]

remarkable depiction of the verification process occurs as an illustration accompanying **Psalm 46** on the Chludov Psalter:



We see, on the left, the sun darkened and the moon turned to blood at the crucifixion, as Peter said [in Acts 2:20] fulfilled Joel 2:31. The illustrator saw these *peri-mortem* events in light of Psalm 46:6

“The heathen were troubled, the kingdoms were moved: **He uttered his voice**, the earth shook” [“Jesus again crying with a loud voice... and the earth quaked and the rocks were rent.” Matt 27:50-51].



The “Good Thief” on Christ’s right [a detail taken from Pilate’s report²⁷⁵] is seen as the embodiment of penitent Israel, looking to Christ, as if declaring “The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” [46:11], while the other thief, embodying disbelieving Israel hangs already deceased. Christ, even in death, seems to reassure: “Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted in the midst of the heathen, I will be exalted²⁷⁶ in the earth” [46:10].

²⁷⁵ F. C. CONYBEARE: “The very archaic fragment of a homily *De Latrone* preserved in Armenian, and ascribed to the philosopher Aristides, author of the famous *Apology*, almost certainly contains a reference to the *Acts of Pilate*, for these alone inform us that it was the right-hand thief who repented. For this extra-canonical detail we look everywhere in vain except in the *A.P.* ch. xii. 2. In Aristides *de Latrone* (Venice, 1878) we read: ‘Remember me, Lord, in thy kingdom... This day with me shalt thou be in the garden.... And now I pray you all, friends of the Christian race, to be instructed by *the faith of the right hand thief* and to agree with him’.” [“ACTA PILATI” in *Studia Biblica et ecclesiastica*, University of Oxford - 1896], p.70

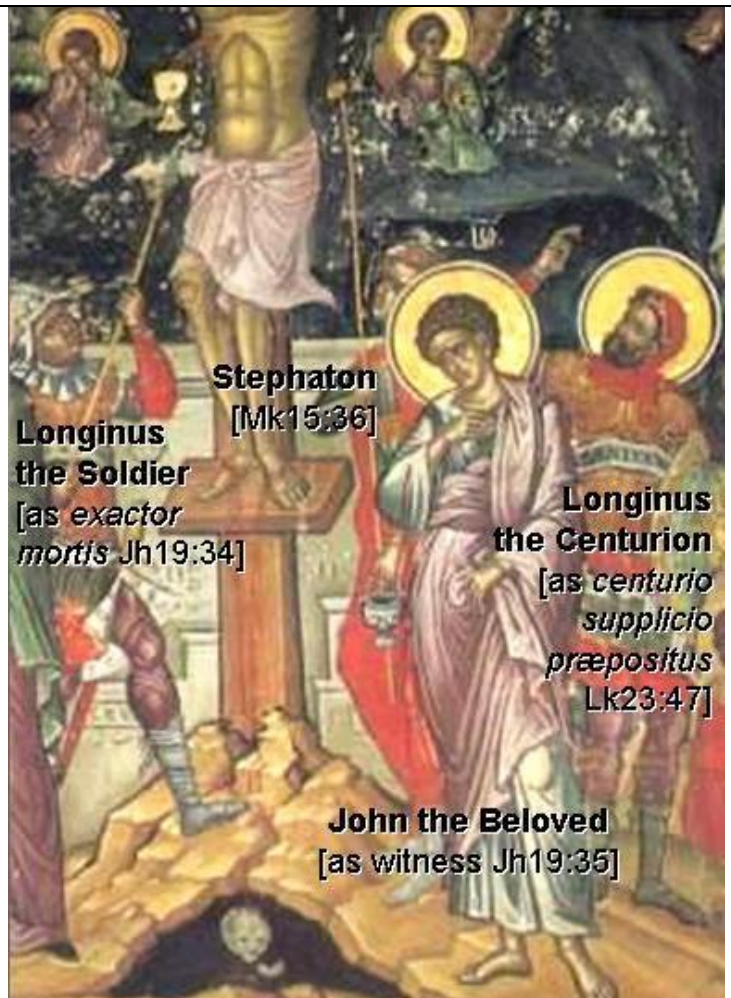
²⁷⁶ H7311 מָרַם — to rise or raise” (Qal) 2) “to be raised, be uplifted” – as on a cross.



“The heathen” and “the kingdoms” of Ps 46:6 are depicted in the middle group, where we see the Roman soldiers huddled together with royal representatives of the Herodian dynasty [two identified by wearing the *loros*, a long scarf, especially the jeweled one worn on festive occasions by the emperor or empress and, by certain dignitaries].



“Longinus” the centurion,²⁷⁷ alongside (but distinguished from) “Longinus” the soldier, look on: “Now the centurion and they that were with him watching Jesus, having seen the earthquake and the things that were done, were sore afraid, saying: *Indeed this was the Son of God.*” [Matt 27:54]. Compare detail from 16th century icon by Theophanes the Cretan, right.



Stephaton
[Mk15:36]
Longinus the Soldier
[as exactor
mortis Jh19:34]

Longinus the Centurion
[as centurio
supplicio
præpositus
Lk23:47]

John the Beloved
[as witness Jh19:35]

²⁷⁷ They are distinguished in the martyrologies. In the *Georgian Chronicle*, Longinus the centurion is the military escort for the Jewish delegation from the kingdom of Iberia, Georgia, sent for the trial of Jesus. He is thus depicted in Sanhedrial garb beneath his armor in Byzantine illuminations, frescoes, and mosaics.



In the far right of the illustration, we see Joseph beseeching Pilate, who holds three scrolls certifying the death for each of the crucified. Over Pilate's shoulder, Dionysius Areopagita [identified as such in the manuscript ; see Acts 17:34] points to the celestial and terrestrial portents, fulfilling Ps 46:8 - "Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations He hath made in the earth" "

We learn about Pilate's approach to governance from the subtle cues of the Gospel. According to Mark, Pilate made a *gift* [*doreo*, to give as a gift; Vg, *donavit*] of the body to Joseph; according to Matthew 27:58, he *ordered* [Vg, *iussit*] that it be handed over to Joseph.

In this regard, Pilate was following the sage advice of his contemporary, Seneca: The good ruler

"will donate (*donabit*) the son to the tears of his mother and will order (*iudebit*) that the chains be loosened and will exempt him from the gladiatorial game and will bury his corpse even if he is a dangerous one." [*On Clemency* II.6.2)]

Contrary to some, the entombment of Christ was not against Roman custom for the crucified.²⁷⁸ In fact, in conjunction with Jewish

²⁷⁸ As Eusebius put it, Christ's body was "consigned, according to the laws of men, to burial" [*Theophania* 3.61]. In *On Clemency*, which was the major statement of his philosophical and political ideals, Seneca lists specifically among the acts of mercy that must be performed by the good ruler that of allowing the burial even of

requirements,²⁷⁹ it was encouraged and utilized to continue the sense of “spectacle” regarding the process. It was another occasion for a public ceremony that reinforced the finality of Roman justice, and a tomb that would become the permanent reminder of the ignominious end for any rebel.

Joseph of Arimathaea was the perfect liaison between the Roman and Temple interests in this spectacle,²⁸⁰ as well as the perfect “secret disciple” [John 19:38].

The *Gospel of Peter* apocryphon refers to him as “Joseph, the friend of Pilate” [2.3], and according to the Syriac *Cave of Treasures*, he “was the bearer of the seal-ring of Pilate, and was a senator,²⁸¹ and had free intercourse with” Pilate.

The eminent theologian and professor of Hebrew at the University of Groningen, Jacob Alting, identified our Biblical Joseph with the historical Joseph ben Gorion²⁸² from the time of Christ; according to Jewish tradition, the latter was a Jerusalemite from a noble, priestly, and WEALTHY family.²⁸³

Peter notes that it was the **rulers** of Jerusalem that officially “took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulcher” (Acts 13:29). This informs us that Joseph was still acting as a credible representative of the Sanhedrin entrusted with representing their best interests when requesting the body of Jesus.²⁸⁴

executed criminals. A text of the jurist Ulpian, who reflects the humanitarian ideals of the Empire in the second century, indicates that it was common to grant this grace to the family of the crucified.

²⁷⁹ *Deuteronomy* (21:22-23, cf *Gospel of Peter*); From Josephus we learn that the Jews extended the rule of *Deuteronomy* to the case of crucifixion **BJ**

²⁸⁰ That Joseph of Arimathea was associated with the priesthood was adduced by Lightfoot from Mark 15:43, on which he comments: “*Joseph of Arimathea* was called with good reason *a counsellor*, because he was a priest, and one of that sacerdotal bench.”¹ *A Commentary on the New Testament From the Talmud and Hebraica*, loc.cit., referencing TB *Yoma* 3b and TJ *Yoma* 38.3] In fact, the title “noble counselor” used by Mark also has many layers of connotations. The old Latin versions translated it *nobilis decurio*. This is a distinctively Roman title, with specifically Roman connotations.¹ See <http://83.1911encyclopedia.org/D/DE/DECURIO.htm>] He was therefore the only *bona fide* go-between to which Pilate could entrust the body of Jesus.

²⁸¹ Bishop Shelomon reports: “Joseph the senator (βουλευτής), and why he was thus called. The senators were a class very much honoured in the land of the Romans; and if it happened that no one could be found of the royal lineage, they made a king from among this class. If one of them committed an offence, they used to beat his horse with white woollen gloves instead of him. This Joseph was not a senator by birth, but he purchased the dignity, and enrolled himself among the Roman senate, and was called Senator” [*Book of the Bee* 44]

²⁸² Alting, Jacob. *Schilo, seu Vaticinio Patriarchiae Jacobi in Gen. 49:10*. [Latin, Ex Officina Joh. Wellens, 1660] A lengthy discussion of the prophecy of Jacob in 49:10 concerning Shiloh. [p. 309, apud John Gill on Matt 27:57]

²⁸³ Gedalah ibn Yahya *Shalshelet ha-Kabbalah* 19.1, D. Ganz *Tzemach David*, cp. 25.1 and 27.1

²⁸⁴ cp. Matt 27:48, Mark 15:43, and Luke 23:52 with Acts 13:29

We also note that Pilate did not merely *allow* but “ordered” (Matt 27:48) the presiding soldiers to turn the body over to the custody of Joseph, something that only makes sense if deferring to the authority of Joseph’s Roman office.

One of the calculated advantages [from both Roman & Jewish standpoints] of entrusting the body to Joseph was his possession of a tomb in proximity to “Golgotha Plaza” – and hence, proximity to this main thoroughfare.

A clue to Pilate’s intentions from the start was him **engraving** the *titulus* [as noted by Sarzanensis²⁸⁵]; usually these were whitewashed & re-used, but **engraving** for permanence suggests Pilate also wanted to use it as a *titulus sepulchris*. In other words, it would mark the tomb as an ongoing reminder to others of the fate of those challenging Roman rule.

The plaza upon which Christ was crucified like the Appian Way: site of many crucifixion, AND the thoroughfare prized for its monumental tombs decorating the way: only the rich and famous could afford tombs in such prominent proximity to the city itself. Josephus tells us the royal Tomb of John Hyrcanus²⁸⁶ was nearby, and only someone as wealthy as Joseph of Arimathea could build a tomb closer.

The next step before the actual deposition from the Cross was the acquisition of the burial shroud, or *sindon*. The linen shroud [Mt 27:59, Mk 15:46, Lk 23:53] was (as John puts it) after “the manner of the Jews is to bury” [19:40]. Rabbi Jonathan, alluding to this custom, when Rabbi Isai was taken, said,

“Let the dead be wrapped in his own linen” וְנִדְבָב (תַּמָּה כְּרָקָא, TJ *Terumot* 46.2²⁸⁷).

²⁸⁵ “On the board, beginning from the top, the inscription is in three lines, and in letters belonging to three tongues — Hebrew, Greek, and Latin; **they were engraved**, so far as one can see, with an iron point.” [L. SARZANENSIS. *De inventione Tituli Crucis*, trans [Combes, Louis](#) *The finding of the cross* New York : Benziger 1907, p.192f]

²⁸⁶ Josephus *BJ* 6.2.10, and context

²⁸⁷ The rabbinic recommendations were “let the wrappings, or grave clothes, be מִיָּבֵל נְטֻפֵּל לָו, [of white linen]; and let not the price of them be dear, for it is forbidden to bury in wrappings of silk, or brodered garments, even to a prince of Israel: for this is pride and destruction, and the work of the Gentiles.” *Juchasin*, fol. 54. 2. Vid. Maimon. *Hilchot Ebel*, c. 4. sect. 2

In art, the *sindon* is often depicted as assisting in Christ's *apokathelosis*, as in Rembrandt's famous renderings:

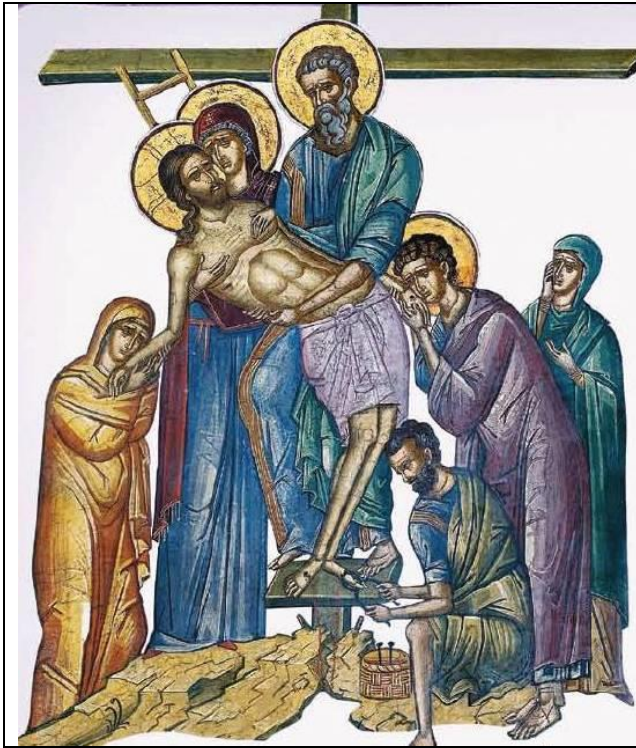


After acquiring the shroud, they then

“plucked the nails from the hands of the Lord and laid him upon the earth: and the whole earth was shaken, and there came a great fear on all. 22 Then the sun shone forth, and it was found to be the ninth hour. 23 And the Jews rejoiced, and gave his body unto Joseph to bury it” [*Gosp.Pet* 6.21].

This brief act, referred to almost in passing by the Gospels [Mark 15:46, Luke 23:53], forms the basis of current Orthodox liturgy for “Good Friday” afternoon service. In the *Apokathelosis* [Αποκαθελωζις, “descent” or “deposition”], as the Gospel lection is read, the priest lowers the body

from the Cross, wraps it in a clean linen cloth, and places it on the Holy Altar. Here again, Christian art elucidates the prophetic nature of the Psalms.



The depiction of the “Descent from the Cross” in Dionysiou Monastery (Mt Athos) Fresco shows Joseph kneeling at the *suppedaneum*, in the process of “plucking” out the nails [as made explicit above] with pliers.²⁸⁸ Nicodemus, perhaps unwittingly at first, is thus forced into a posture of prayer at the feet of the Lord.

The historical incidental of the *suppedaneum* becomes not-so-incidental in light of OT prophetic foreshadowing. When the Psalmist commands, “Worship at this footstool... Worship at his holy mountain” [Psalm 98:5,9], the Church illustrated the passage with the post-deposition Cross, and the image of Calvary.²⁸⁹ The *suppedaneum* was the Lord’s literal footrest. Many hymns of the Church invite us to “Survey the wondrous Cross,” and contemplate the “Sacred Head now wounded” with the eyes of the heart [Eph 1:18], as Nicodemus and Joseph did physically. Similarly, the call to “worship at the place where his feet stood” in Psalm 132:7, could not help but be seen by the Church as a reference to worshipping at the foot of the Cross.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ Mary Whanger & Alan Whanger “have found images of many objects in addition to those of the body, and that these images show evidence of electron coronal discharge radiation. These additional objects include a crucifixion nail, a Roman spear, a sponge on a stick, a crown of thorns, two scourges, a large hammer, *a pair of pliers*, and two desecrated Jewish phylacteries or prayer boxes. All are consistent with 1st Century objects, with Roman crucifixions of Jews, with Jewish burial practices.” <http://web.duke.edu/~adw2/shroud/whanger.htm>

²⁸⁹ *Pantocrator Psalter*, f. 140, illustrates Psa 98:9 with a miniature of Golgotha surmounted by a sanctuary. *Chludov*, f. 98V, has a miniature of the empty cross. The same subject is represented in the *Barberini Psalter*, f. 168, illustrating verse 5. The *Paris Psalter*, f. 6V, also has a miniature of the empty cross illustrating verse 5, together with, on f. 7, a second miniature, illustrating verse 9, of a cross upon which is placed a clipeate icon of Christ. In *London Psalter* f. 131, verse 5 is illustrated with a miniature of John Chrysostom presiding at the rite of the *Exaltation of the Cross*. Most recently Cutler has pointed out that verse 9 —and later verse 5 — were used as the *prokeimenon* in the office of the *Exaltation of the Cross*. Theodore Studite’s *Homily 2, In adorationem crucis*, preached on the occasion of the adoration of the Cross in mid-Lent, in which he quotes verse 5 of this Psalm.

²⁹⁰ In *London*, f. 172V, and *Barberini*, f. 223, Psa 132:7 is illustrated with a miniature of Christ, wearing a long straight *colobium*, attached to the Cross. To left and right stand figures worshipping Him. This verse was quoted in the troparion Σήμερον ἡ ὑμῶν προφητικὸν πεπλήρωται λόγιον, which was frequently used in Byzantine

The expeditious movement of the Body to the tomb was accomplished, as John states,

“because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand.”

This allowed for a complete preparation of the Body according to custom, in spite of the hurried circumstance.²⁹¹

“And he took the Lord and *washed him*²⁹² and wrapped him in linen and brought him unto his own sepulchre, which is called the ‘Garden of Joseph’” [*Gosp. Pet* 6.24].

The urgency of the time constraint was heightened, not only because of the setting sun [Deut 21:22], but also because it was a “high day” [John 19:31], “the night of the Sabbath” as the Persic version reads, [19:42], or the “eve of the Passover” per the Talmud [*Sanh* 43a].²⁹³ The “stone of unction” in the *Church of the Holy Sepulchre* is traditionally venerated as the site where Christ’s Body was prepared for burial.²⁹⁴

worship, notably for the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross and in the rite of the veneration of the Cross on the 4th Tuesday in Lent [*Typicon*, I, p. 28 ; II, p. 40 ; *Initia hymnorum*, III, p. 496]

²⁹¹ Although the law in Deut. xxi. 23 refers only to the culprit exposed on the gallows, the rabbinical interpretation derives from it that “no corpse is to remain unburied overnight” (*Sanh.* vi. 4, 46a, b; Maimonides, *Abel*, iv. 8; Shulhan 'Aruk, *Yoreh De'ah*, 357, 1). With reference to Num. xx. 1, it is even urged that **burial** should follow death closely (*M. K.* 28a; compare Acts v. 6-10; To keep the dead overnight was not permitted in the city of Jerusalem” (Tosef., *Neg.* vi. 2; *B. K.* 82b; *Ab. R. N.* xxxv.).

²⁹² Forensic pathologist Frederick T. Zugibe MD/PhD, has demonstrated that the remarkably precise blood patterns on the “Shroud of Turin” are only possible post-mortem **when the body has been washed**. <http://www.shroud.com/zugibe2.htm> Cp Virgil Aenid 6.219, Tert Apol 42, *Homer tells us was the case with the body of Patroclus*:— wv eipwn, etaroisiv ekekletō diōv acilleuv, amoi puri sthsai tripoda megan, ofra tacista patroklon louseian-kai tote dh lousan te, kai hleiyan lip elaiw Iliad xviii. 343. “So saying, he bade his train surround with fire A tripod huge, that they might quickly cleanse Patroclus from all stains of clotted gore. They on the blazing hearth a tripod placed, Infused the water, thrust dry wood beneath, And soon the flames, encompassing around Its ample belly, warm'd the flood within. Soon as the water in the singing brass Simmer'd, they bathed him, and with limpid oil Anointed. They stretch'd him on his bed, then cover'd him From head to feet with linen texture light, And with a wide unsullied mantle last.” COWPER. *Ign. Ant ad Antioch*

Chapter XII.—Salutations. I salute the holy presbytery. I salute the sacred deacons, and that person most dear to me, [Literally, “the name desirable to me,” referring to Hero the deacon] whom may I behold, through the Holy Spirit, occupying my place when I shall attain to Christ. My soul be in place of his. I salute the sub-deacons, the readers, the singers, the doorkeepers, the labourers, [A class of persons connected with the Church, whose duty it was to bury the bodies of the martyrs and others] the exorcists, the confessors. [Such as voluntarily confessed Christ before Gentile rulers] I salute the keepers of the holy gates, the deaconesses in Christ. I salute the virgins betrothed to Christ, of whom may I have joy in the Lord Jesus. [Some insert here a clause referring to *widows*] I salute the people of the Lord, from the smallest to the greatest, and all my sisters in the Lord.

²⁹³ It was regarded as one of the laws of humanity “not to let any one lie unburied” (Josephus, “Contra Ap.” ii. 29 [30] ; Philo, *Hypothetica*, ed. Mangey, ii. 629; Bernays, “Gesammelte Schriften,” i. 277 *et seq.*, who shows this to have been also an old Athenian law of Buzyges).

²⁹⁴ Ceremony of washing a dead body before burial. This rite is performed by the members (“mit'assekim”) of the “ḥebra ḳaddisha.” The body is lifted from the ground, where it has been placed after death, and laid, feet toward the door, on the cleansing-table known as the “ṭaharah-board.” The black cover and the old garments are removed, and a white sheet put under it, while the members assembled say a prayer for the dead, and recite, “Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment” (Zech. iii. 4). Then begins the washing. The body is thoroughly rubbed and cleansed with lukewarm water, during which process the mouth is covered so that no water may enter it. Next water is poured over the head, while Ezek. xxxvi. 25 is recited: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean.” This is followed by washing each limb downward, the appropriate verses of Cant. v. 11 *et seq.* being repeated as the washing progresses: “His head is as the most fine gold . . . His eyes are as the eyes of doves,” etc.



The secondary impact of this proximity and time constraint was that Christ's naked body had to be washed and prepared in the open, in full view of the Passover crowds.

When Paul said “I fill up in my own person whatever is lacking in Christ's afflictions, on behalf of His Body” [Col 1:24], he includes in his list of afflictions literal “cold, and nakedness” [2Cor 11:27], just as Christ experienced. We will recall Paul saying, “God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world” [1Cor 4:9], an allusion to the gladiatorial games, where the fourth and final exhibition was condemned men sent naked and unarmed into the arena to face their death. Paul saw this shameful nakedness as merely putting “off the old man” [Col 3:9, Eph 4:22], for “the washing of water by the word,” [Eph 5:26], that he might “put on [or, be enshrouded by] Christ” [Gal 3:], “for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” [Col 3:3]

The Talmud itself reveals a particular significance to the type of shroud used in Christ's case; as Lightfoot pointed out:

Luke 23:53 [Wrapped it in linen] “Mar Zutra saith, that out of the linen in which they wrapped up books, when it grew old they made shrouds for the ‘dead of the precept’; for this is to their disgrace.²⁹⁵” [Megillah 26b]. The Gloss adds, “That they do it of the linen wherein they fold up the book of the Law.” Him who had suffered death by the sentence of the Sanhedrim, or magistrate, they were wont to call *the dead of the precept*, because he was executed according to the precept: and such a one to them was our Jesus.²⁹⁶

This remarkable passage provides two insights:

- 1) Jews would customarily wrap and handle Torah scrolls only with special linen mantles,²⁹⁷ and
- 2) that Jesus would have been enshrouded in just such a linen for his burial.

The early Church Fathers were familiar with this Jewish custom; Hilary of Poitiers complained of Jews who read but did not understand the Psalms, who were **afraid to touch the scriptures** when they read them,²⁹⁸ and Jerome's criticism focused upon the Torah mantle as a symbol for the veiled intelligence of the Jews²⁹⁹ – alluding to [2 Corinthians 3.14](#):

“But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which *veil* is done away in Christ.”

The account of Moses putting on this veil is in [Ex 34:33](#), where Jarchi comments that it was a "garment" which he put before his face. Both the *Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem* call it *ardwo* [= **sudara**], “a linen cloth.” We see Moses’ hands wrapped in such a linen receiving the Torah in Hellenistic and Byzantine depictions:

²⁹⁵ “Genizah” [translated as “disgrace” by Lightfoot] is usually translated as “storage”, but really implies “buried for the purpose of hiding”; In *Pes.* 56a Hezekiah hides (“ganaz”) a medical work; in *Shab.* 115a R. Gamaliel orders that the *Targum to Job* should be hidden (“yigganez”) under the “nidbak” (layer of stones). In *Shab.* 30b some sages sought to hide (“lignoz”) as heretical the books of Ecclesiastes and Proverbs. The same thing occurs in *Shab.* 13b in regard to the Book of Ezekiel, and in *Pes.* 62 in regard to the Book of Genealogies.

²⁹⁶ John Lightfoot *The whole works of the Rev. John Lightfoot*: , 1823, Volume 12 - Page 205-

²⁹⁷ See discussion at Mishnah *Yadayim* 3:5

²⁹⁸ ‘Qua enim religionis simulatione prophetarum libros venerentur, multis cognitum est; contrectare legentes manu non audit, linteo substernunt ad fidem sacramenti testes [non?] eos adhibent [on Psalm 131.1, PL 9:728b]

²⁹⁹ ‘Usque hodie enim velamen Judaeis in veteri positum est Testamento’. *Commentariorum in Ezechielem* 1.2.9, *PL*, Vol. 25: 34A. And as Origen (ed. Charles & Charles Vincent de la Rue, Paris, 1783, vol ii. P.525) says that the holy Scriptures are locked with the key of David, and sealed with the power of God, so Hilarius also remarks (*Proleg.* 5-7): “the key of David is the theanthropic person of Jesus Christ, whose type is the Psalmist both in his inward and external experience, (vid. on Ps. cxxiv.) ever speaking by the Holy Ghost (vid. on Ps. i.) to which the prophetic tone of his discourse and his figurative language, frequently point” (vid. on Ps. cxix. 1).



Hellenistic MS illumination in the "Paris Psalter"³⁰⁰

This same imagery was incorporated into Christian art for the *Traditio Legis* ("handing over the law") where the youthful and glorified Christ, exalted above the vault of heaven, hands the scroll of the "New Covenant" to the Apostle Peter, as in the ancient³⁰¹ "Lateran Sarcophagus below":

³⁰⁰ Greek MS originally from Constantinople, now in France; usually dated to the 10th-century. This and other miniatures are so **Hellenistic** in execution and so unlike the received notion of what medieval art in general and Byzantine art in particular should look like, that most 19th-century authorities dated the manuscript to the time of Justinian. The 1919 *Encyclopedia Americana* suggests: "The 'Paris Psalter,' dating from the 10th century (Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, Gr. 139), has scenes of the life of David, reproduced from 3rd or 4th century models, that vie with the frescoes of Pompeii in freshness and brilliancy"

³⁰¹ "found in the crypt of S. Peter's [in 1591], which is considered perhaps to be the finest specimen of Christian sculpture of all the sarcophagi in the Lateran Museum, amongst other scenes are represented the Apostles grouped around our Lord, Who is seated is the centre as in glory. De Rossi remarks that the grace and refinement of the faces of our Lord and the Apostles would incline us to ascribe this work to the age of Septimius Severus (A.D. 194 [J Sickler, *Almanach aus Rom*. pp. 173-4, actually assigns to it that date]) rather than to that of Constantine" [[Thomas Livius, S. Peter, bishop of Rome: 1888- Page 138](#)]; made of Greek marb



Peter is depicted here as a “new” or “Second Moses” receiving the New Law superseding the Old, with the very same *Sudarion*/“linen cloth” he was entrusted with after the resurrection. The significance of the symbolism is clear: when Christ was buried in a Torah-shroud “according to the precept,” he was unwittingly recognized as the embodiment, the fulfillment of the Old Covenant.

His burial as such signified the fulfillment and *end* of that covenant, or as Paul put it, “Christ is the end³⁰² of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” [Rom 10:4].

³⁰² In all three connotations of *τελος* in Greek: 1) goal, 2) fulfillment, and 3) termination [cp 2Cor3:13] and the Fathers on these verses

That Christ was the embodiment of a New Covenant, a new “Torah Scroll” – so to speak – is subtly alluded to be the apostle Peter himself when he states:

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, **leaving us an example**” [1 Pet 2:21].

The Greek here is *υμιν υπολιμπανων υπογραμμων*, - i.e., Christ is the underwritten scroll upon which we trace our lives.³⁰³

When He was resurrected, His glorified body, and graveclothes, came to signify the birth of the New Covenant. Note how Pope Sylvester I addressed this in AD 325, with Emperor Constantine and three hundred-twenty seven bishops in attendance, teaching that the:

“Mass be celebrated on an altar, covered with a cloth of linen consecrated by the Bishop, as if it were the clean *Shroud of Christ*.”

Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. A.D. 350-428), describes the role of the deacons in the liturgy of the “Body and Blood” in his *Cateches* as follows:

“When they bring up [the Eucharist] they place it on the altar, for the completed representation of the passion so that we may think of Him on the altar as if He were placed in the sepulcher, after having received the passion...the deacons who spread the linens on the altar represent the figure of *the linen cloths at the burial*.”

☐ John 19:39 “And there came also **Nicodemus**, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight.”

The extravagance of 100 pounds of “myrrhs³⁰⁴ and aloes”³⁰⁵ [John 19:39, **NOT** for embalming or cremation³⁰⁶] suggests a burial associated only

³⁰³ Present active participle of the late Ionic verb *υπολιμπανω* (in the papyri) for the common *υπολειπω*, to leave behind (under), here only in N.T. *υπογραμμος* is also a late and rare word (from *υπογραφω*, to write under), a writing-copy for one to imitate, in II Macc. 2:28; Philo, Clement of Rome, here only in N.T. Clement of Alex. (*Strom.* V.8.49) uses it of the copy-head at the top of a child's exercise book for the child to imitate, including all the letters of the alphabet. The papyri give many examples of *υπογραφη* and *υπογραφω* in the sense of copying a letter. [Robertson's]; John's disciple Polycarp uses the same language [*ep ad Phil* 7]

³⁰⁴ “We do not go to your spectacles; yet the articles that are sold there, if I need them, I will obtain more readily at their proper places. We certainly buy no frankincense. If the Arabians complain of this, let the Sabæans be well assured that their more precious and costly merchandise is expended as largely in the burying of Christians [An interesting fact as to the burial-rites of Early Christians. As to incense, see cap. xxx], as in the fumigating of the gods” TERT APOL xlii; Martial {L. 11. *Epigr.* 35} “—& olentem funera myrrham”; and so Nazianzen, speaking of his brother Caesarius, says {*Epist.* 18. p. 78l. Tom. I.}, “he lies dead, friendless, desolate, miserable, smurnhv olighv hxiwmenov, “favoured with a little myrrh.”

³⁰⁵ *Calmet* notes that the **aloes** mentioned here is a liquor which runs from an aromatic tree, not that which is not commonly called “aloe” - Nonnus calls it the “Indian aloe,” which was of a sweet odor.

³⁰⁶ Gill notes: “This mixture of myrrh and aloes together, . . . was **not** designed for the embalming of his body, and preserving it from putrefaction; for he was not embalmed” but was rather for the fumigation of the sepulchre with what the *Mishnah* calls “the spices of the dead” [m. *Beracot.* 8.6]; the use of which, Bartenora [on TJ

with **royalty**; five hundred servants bearing aromatics attended the funeral of Herod [Jos *Ant.* xv.3.4; xvii.8.3]; more significantly, it harkens back to Asa, the king of Judah, when “they buried him in his own sepulchre, . . . and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odours and divers kinds of spices prepared by the apothecaries’ art” [2Chr 16:14].

Early Christian scholars of the Talmud³⁰⁷ had no trouble identifying him as Nicodemus (or *Naqdimon*) ben Gorion.³⁰⁸ The rabbinic literature preserves a number of traditions regarding Nicodemus and the Gorion family. His official duties in Jerusalem included overseeing the water supply needed for festival pilgrims.³⁰⁹ This would shed light on Jesus’ conversation with him that emphasized the image of water (John 3:5), a conversation that probably took place near the immersion pool by the *Miphkad* altar on Mt. Olives (m.*Parah* 3:7).

John’s portrayal of Nicodemus and Joseph working together to give Jesus a proper burial hints at a reconciliation between previously estranged brothers (They are never mentioned together in Jewish sources). It also depicts adherence to the *rechitsah gedolah* ritual – the “grand washing” prescribed by Hillel the Elder for one recognized as a “great man” in Israel.³¹⁰

Beracot fol. 12.2] says, was to drive away an ungrateful smell. Mark 16:1 in the Arabic version reads, “anoint the sepulchre” and sionologist M.G. Siliato has pointed out similar practices among the Jews in the catacombs of Rome. [Siliato, Maria Grazia *El Hombre de la Sabana Santa* Velasco, Miguel Ángel ISBN 13: 9788422012832 [Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos: 1987] The burning of the body so that even the bones were consumed was considered a disgrace (Amos ii. 1); and was inflicted as a punishment (Josh. vii. 25. Compare Tacitus, *Hist* v. 5: “They [the Jews] bury rather than burn their dead.” The body was washed and anointed with aromatic unguents, and wrapped in linen clothes (*Shab.* xxiii. 5; *Sem.* i. 2, 3; Acts ix. 37; John xi. 44, xii. 7, xix. 39 *et seq.*, xx. 6 *et seq.*; Matt. xxvii. 59; Mark xv. 46 *et seq.*; Luke xxiii. 53 *et seq.*; *Testament of Abraham*, xx.). R. Gamaliel II set the example by the order he gave for his own funeral, and thus introduced the custom of burying the dead in simple linen garments (*Ket.* 8b; *M. K.* 27b). In the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, Judah enjoins his sons “not to bury him in costly garments nor to cut open his body” (for embalming), as is done to kings (*Judah* xxvi.; compare Josephus, *Contra Apion* ii. 27).

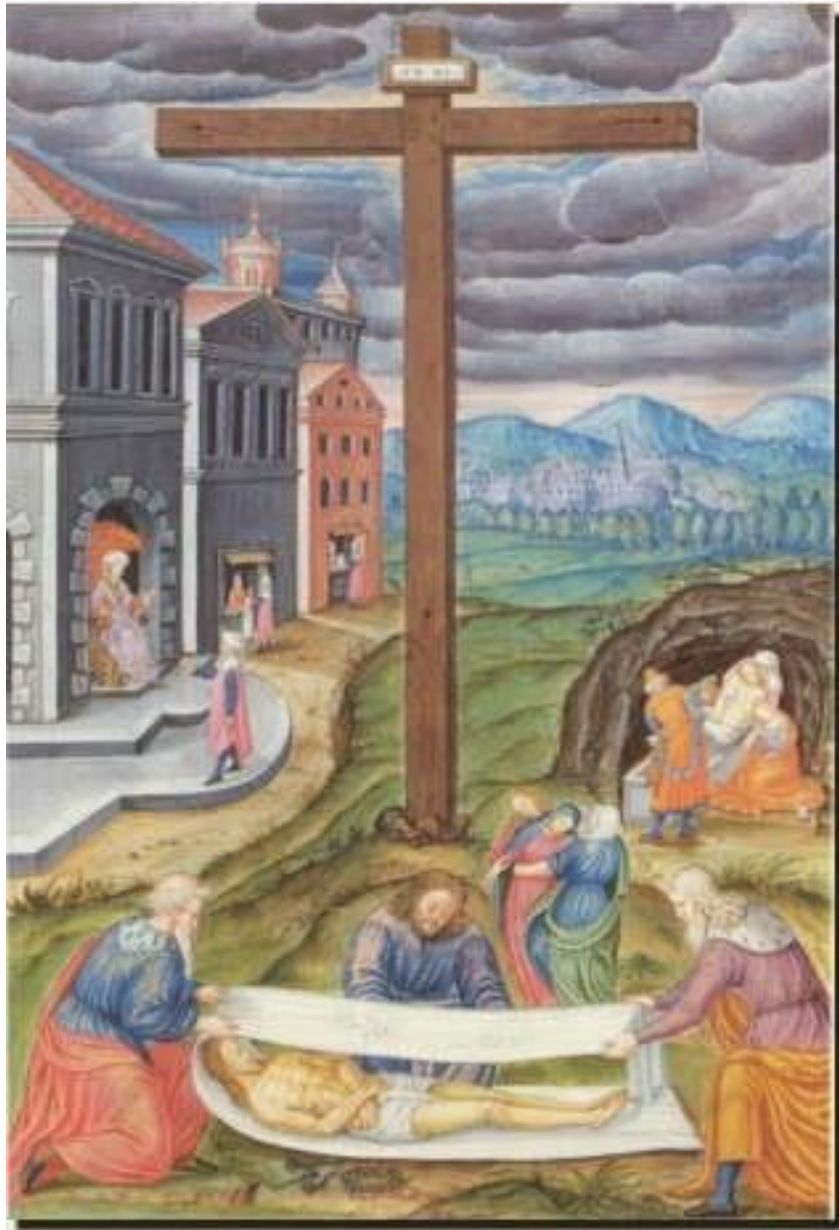
³⁰⁷ e.g., see Gill on John 3:1, and even the old *Jewish Encyclopedia*: “In all probability he is identical with the Talmudical Nicodemus ben Gorion, a popular saint noted for his miraculous powers; and this would explain also the reference to “heavenly things” in Jesus’ arguments with him (John iii. 12).”

<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=272&letter=N> . More recently, see D. Flusser *Jesus in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Hamburg: Rowohlt 1968): 122

³⁰⁸ T.B. *Taan* 19b-21a, *Kethub* 66b, *Gittin* 56a; also *Ab.R.Nath.* 6, *Genesis Rabbah* 42. *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* on 7:11-12, and *Lamentations Rabbah* on 1:5

³⁰⁹ See J.B. Lightfoot’s *Commentary* on John 3:1 commenting on T.B. *Taan* 19b-21a According to *Genesis Rabbah* 42:1, he was among the three “great ones of the land,” a description consistent with references to him being a councilor (one of the βουλευταί [See <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=229&letter=S>] of the Sanhedrin) and John calling him “a ruler of the Jews” (3:1). Similarly, Jesus’ expectation regarding Nicodemus’ insight into spiritual matters (John 3:7,10) can be seen in light of the rabbis’ claim that “Just as the sun stood still for Joshua, so did the sun stand still for Moses and for Naqdimon ben Gorion” (T.B. *Abodah Zarah* 25a). The rabbis also inform us that his Hebraic name was “Buni” and the Talmud specifically identifies Buni as a disciple of Jesus (T.B. *Sanhedrin* 43a). We learn from Josephus that his son was among the three prominent Pharisees[cp. *Vita* 39, where Ananias and Judas are identified as Pharisees] sent as representatives of Jerusalem to receive the surrender of the local Roman garrison (*Wars* 2.17.10) during the beginning of the Jewish revolt, and that a family ancestor was an ambassador to Rome (*Antiquities* 14.3.2).[A. Schlatter *Der Evangelist Johannes* (Stuttgart 1930): 84]

³¹⁰ (see Aaron Berechiah of Modena “*Ma’abar Yabboq*,” p. 42b, end) apud <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=18&letter=T> & <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?letter=A&artid=20>



This ceremony was to be performed by *two* persons at least, and the water be perfumed with essence of roses, with myrtle, or with spices. Nicodemus ben Gorion was known for his extravagant generosity when it came to anointing spices [TB *Keth* 66a³¹¹]. University of Brighton lecturer Norma Weller has identified traces of myrtle³¹² on the “Shroud of Turin.” In spite of the ignominious circumstances of the washing and anointing – they were intent on giving Christ a royal burial.

³¹¹ Women perfume themselves when going out (see Josephus, *B J* iv. 9, § 10). A wife could demand one-tenth of her dowry-income for unguents and perfumes; the daughter of the rich Nicodemus ben Gorion was accustomed to spend annually four hundred gold denarii for the same (*Ket.* 66b). These facts serve to cast light on the story of Luke, vii. 38-46, and John, xii. 3.

³¹² Myrtle on the shroud: <http://www.altguide.com/turin/shroud.html> Helen Frenkley, Director of *Neot Kedumin*, the Biblical Landscape reserve in Israel, "In Jewish tradition dating back at least to the Mishnaic period the myrtle symbolizes immortality and success, because of its ability to withstand extended periods of drought and to remain green and fragrant throughout the year. Sprigs of myrtle were held by brides under the wedding canopy and conversely placed on the Shroud of the deceased before burial."

Chapter 5

Matthew records that Joseph laid Jesus “in his own new tomb [μνημειῷ], which he had **hewn out in the rock**: and he rolled **a great stone** to the door³¹³ of the sepulchre [μνημείου], and departed” [Mt 27:60]. They could not dig a grave purposely for him, for it was forbidden on feast days; therefore they put him into a ready-made tomb.³¹⁴

Hebrews generally preferred burying their dead in gardens, and/or beneath shady trees [Gen 23:17, 35:8; 1Sam 31:13; 2Kings 21:18-26, 23:16], whenever possible.



Depiction of Garden Tomb in *Rabbula Gospel Codex*, AD 568



Carved Ivory Panel [c.400]
Bavarian National Museum

John reports:

“Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and *in the garden* a new sepulchre [mnhmeion], wherein was never man yet laid” [19:41].

³¹³ CyrJ: “And whence did the Saviour arise? He says, in the Song of Songs, “Rise up, my love, and come away” (ii, 10); and afterwards, in the cleft [cave] of the rock [petra] for the cleft [cave] of the rock he calls the cleft (cave) which was then at the door of the salutary sepulchre, [mnematos] and was hewn out of the rock itself, as it is customary here [in Jerusalem] in front of sepulchres. . . . He says then in the Songs (ii, 14), in “the cleft [cave] of the rock near the outer wall.” *Cateches.* xiv, 9; Eusebius *Theophania* 3.61: “The grave itself was a **cave** which had recently been hewn out; a cave that had now been cut out **in a rock**, and which had experienced (the reception of) no other body. . . . and having only one cavern within it”

³¹⁴ The Mishnaic ruling states: “they may not dig pits, nor graves תרבוץ, on a solemn feast day” (*m. Moed Katon*, 1.6); Commentators Maimonides & Bartenora say the former of these, are graves dug in the earth, and the latter edifices built over graves

As Cyril of Jerusalem put it:

“And wouldst thou know the place also? For though it be now adorned, and that most excellently, with royal gifts yet it was before a garden, and the tokens and traces thereof remain.” [*Catechetical Lectures*, xiv.5]

According to John 20:15, Mary thought the voice was that of the grove-keeper (κεπουρος). This is a word composed of κεπος, “grove” and ουρος, “guardian, watcher”. This was a sacred duty, and Mary addresses the presumed grove-keeper, not as a peasant, but as κυριε - “Lord” – in keeping with his office.



This was no haphazard field of weeds, but a cultivated memorial garden³¹⁵ meant to complement a significant sepulchre, designed to accommodate visitors, and spectators:

▣ Mark 15:47 “And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld [εθεωρουν] where he was laid.”

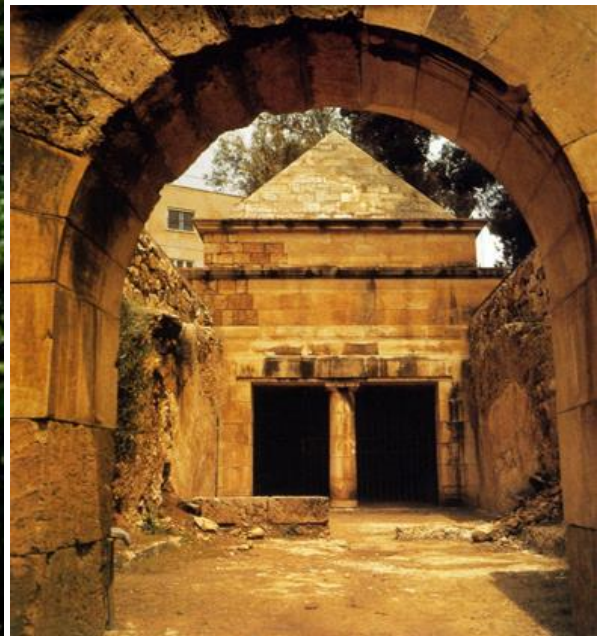
▣ Matt 27:60 “And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre,

³¹⁵ The garden itself becomes a major theme in *post*-Biblical literature: “And the Jews rejoiced, and gave his body unto Joseph to bury it, because he had beheld all the good things which he did. And he took the Lord and washed him and wrapped him in linen and brought him unto his own sepulchre, which is called the ‘Garden of Joseph.’” [*Evang. Pet.* 6:23-24]. The present-tense reference - “is called” - seems to make the writer refer to a current landmark, still accessible to his pre-Hadrianic readers; perhaps the name given to it by pilgrims like those who wrote the “domine ivimus” inscription. According to the *Cave of Treasures*, “it belonged to Joseph, and it had been given unto him as an inheritance by Phinehas, the Levite, the son of Joseph’s uncle.” Another early extra-biblical occurrence of the garden-burial tradition is in Tertullian’s *De Spectaculis* xxx, where the late-2nd-century theologian scoffs at his Jewish opponents account of the burial of Christ: “This is He whom [you claim] His disciples have stolen away secretly [cf Matt 28:13], that it may be said He is risen, or the gardener abstracted that his lettuces might not be damaged by the crowd of visitors!”

and departed. 61 And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.”

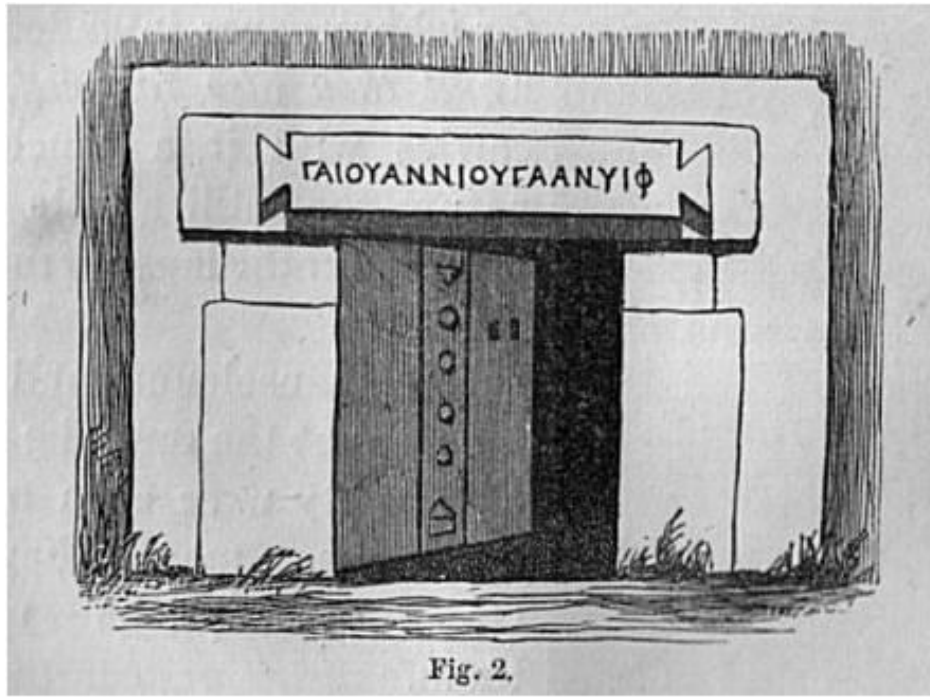
▣ Luke 23:55 “And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld [εθεασαντο] the sepulchre, and how his body was laid.”

Again, Luke’s word choice suggests the air of theatrically engineered by the authorities responsible for the occasion. The root, θεαομαι, suggests “to behold, look upon, view attentively, contemplate (often used of public shows)” [Strong’s]. Joseph would have prepared the tomb and the site according to Rabbinic guidelines, including a courtyard area for visitors.³¹⁶



Typical “Second Temple” era “Garden Tomb” with courtyard [**The Tomb of Jason, in the Rehavia neighborhood of Jerusalem**]

³¹⁶ *B.B.* vi.8; *TJ B.B.* iii.13d; *Ket.* 84a; *M.K.* 8b. As Tertullian pointed out, “when His body was taken down from the cross and placed in a sepulchre, the Jews in their *eager watchfulness* surrounded it with a **large** military guard.” [*Apology* 21] The breakdown of the contingency is given in a medieval adaptation of Josephus: “But others said that it was not possible to steal him, because they had put guards all round his grave, - **30 Romans**, but a **1000 Jews**” [“Slavonic Josephus” inserted after *BJ* 5.5.4]



Example of Syrian Tomb with engraved *titulus sepulchris*

The engraved titulus of Pilate would now be placed over the tomb. This continued the consternation of Jewish authorities, who were determined to deny Christ the *titular* declaration of “Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews” [John 19:21]. According to “Slavonic Josephus,” they set up a counter-*titulus* in the Temple precincts:

And over these tablets with inscriptions hung a fourth tablet with inscription in these [three] characters, to the effect: “Jesus has NOT reigned as king; he has been crucified by the Jews, because he proclaimed the destruction of the city and the laying waste of the temple.” [Inserted at *B J 5.5.2*]

The greater spectacle was reserved for the “high Holy day” itself.³¹⁷ Temple authorities approached Pilate one more time in order to have a public re-sealing, and combined watch placed at the sepulchre [Matt 27:62-66].

Joseph had been empowered by Pilate, and mandated by the Sanhedrin, to confiscate all the instruments of the Passion, for burial with the body of Christ. The tomb would have been checked to ensure that all the

³¹⁷ According to traditional accounts, the disciples wept, fasted & hid themselves that Saturday [*Evan.Pet.* 7:26-27, et al].

paraphernalia of the Crucifixion remained interred with the body, in accordance with Jewish custom:

□ “The stone with which he [the condemned] was stoned, the gallows on which he was hanged, the sword with which he was beheaded, or the cloth with which he was strangled, are all buried with him” [Sanhedrin 6.4, 45b; Sifre Deut. 221³¹⁸].

This is why a cross was never a natural or permanent one, like a tree, but an artificial arrangement, easily removable. When once used, it must be buried out of sight - “it was regarded as part of the body and must be carried with it when moved.”³¹⁹

Theodoretus, in his account of the finding of the cross by Helena, confirms, “That the three crosses were [re-] buried in the earth near³²⁰ the place of our Lord’s sepulchre” [Hist. Ecclesiast. 1.17,18].

The tomb would have been re-opened while official Temple, Herodian, and Roman observers verified the presence of the Body. Ignatius of Antioch wrote as a verified truth that

“during the Sabbath He continued under the earth *in the tomb* in which Joseph of Arimathæa had laid Him”³²¹

Athanasius explained that our Lord

“waited one whole day *to show* that His body was really dead, and then on the third day showed it incorruptible to all” [on the Incarnation 26].

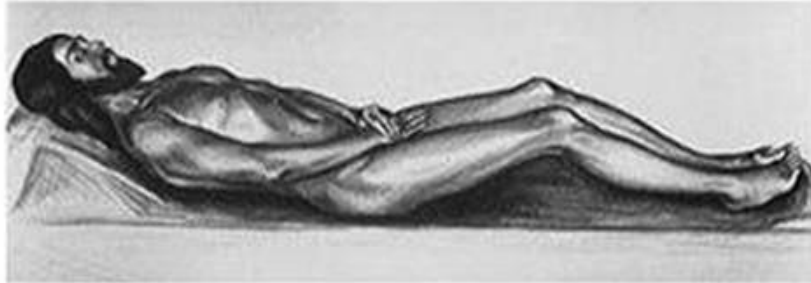
³¹⁸ “The Jews never hang any malefactor upon a tree that is growing in the earth, but upon a **post fixed in the ground**, that it might never be said, ‘That is the tree on which such a one was hanged;’ for custom required that **the tree should be buried with the malefactor**. In like manner the stone by which a criminal was stoned to death, or the sword by which he was beheaded, or the napkin or handkerchief by which he was strangled, should be buried with him in the same grave.” Maimonides, apud Casaub. in Baron. Exercitat. xvi. An. 34, Nu. 134 “Non suspendunt super arbore, quae radicibus solo adhaereat; sed super ligno eradicato, ut ne sit excisio molesta: nam lignum, super quo fuit aliquis suspensus, cum suspendioso sepelitur; ne maneat illi malum nomen, et disongs homines, Istud est lignum, in quo suspensus est ille, odeina. Sic lapis, quo aliquis fuit lapidatus; et gladius, quo fuit occisus is qui est occisus; et sudarium sive mantile, quo fuit aliquis strangulatus; omnia haec cum iis, qui perierunt, sepeliuntur.” “For as the hanged man was considered the greatest abomination, so the very post or wood on which he was hanged was deemed a most abominable thing, and therefore buried under the earth.” Kalinski, Vaticinta Observationibus Illustrata, p. 342. “Cum itaque homo suspensum maximae esset abominationi-Judaei quoque prae caeteris abominabantur lignum quo fuerat suspensus, ita ut illud quoque terra tegerent, tanquam rem abominabilem. Unde interpres Chaldaeus haec verba transtulit *kechat temir*, sicut virgultum absconditum, sive sepultum.” Kalinski, Vaticinta Observationibus Illustrata, p. 342.

³¹⁹ Compare Nazir 65a: “R. Eleazar explained that he takes the loose earth and digs up three finger-breadths of the virgin soil” [under the corpse, being the depth to which any blood etc, coming from the body would penetrate]

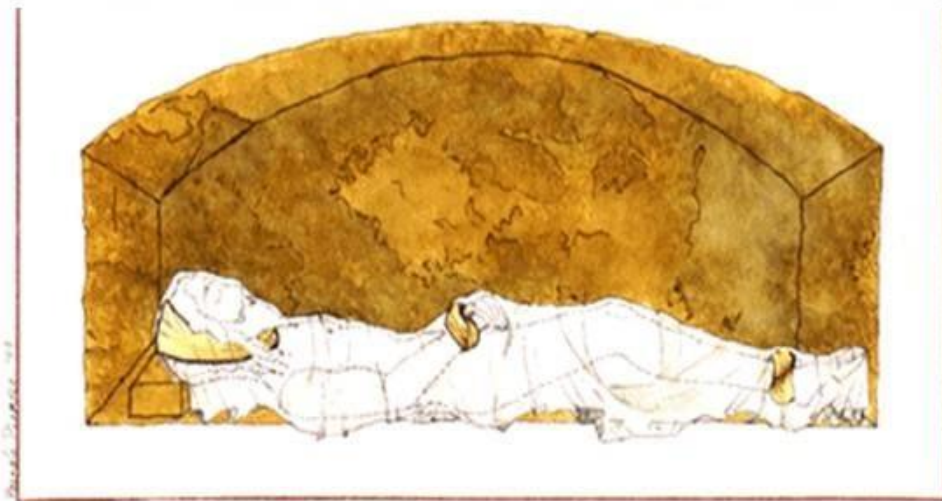
³²⁰ GEMERA on m.Sanh 6.4: “But does not a Boraitha state that the stone with which he was stoned, as well as the tree upon which he was hanged, or the sword with which he was killed, or the muffler with which he was choked, must be buried with him? It means that before it was buried they prepared another like it, which remained. But is there not another Boraitha which states that the above things were not buried with the one executed? Said R. Papa: It does not mean that it was buried just with him, but near him, at a distance of four ells” cf. Syriac Transitus Mariae: “And the Jews took away the cross of our Lord, and those two other crosses, and that spear with which our Saviour was struck, and those nails which they drove into His hands and into His feet, and those robes of mockery in which He had been clad; and they hid them: lest, as they said, any one of the kings or of the chief persons should come and inquire concerning the putting to death of Christ”. Most of these “accursed” implements, when recovered from the Tomb in the 4th century became known in medieval times as *Arma Christi* [“Weapons of Christ”]. Those who had renounced the “weapons of this world” (2Cor 10:4) sought spiritual strength in these.

³²¹ ad Trall 9; Eusebius Demo Evan 4.12 And so because He cared for the salvation of all for ages past, and that “He might bring to naught him that hath the power of death,” as Scripture teaches, here again he underwent the dispensation in His mingled Natures: as Man, he left His Body to the usual burial, while as God He departed from it.”

They confirmed the undisturbed position of His Body. Based on an analysis of the “Shroud of Turin,” His Body appears to have been lain in a manner approximating the reconstruction below, conforming to how the 100 pounds of spices [John 19:39] were distributed within the coffin, that became his funeral bed [*ala* 2Chr 16:14].



Position réelle du corps (vue de 3/4) d'après les études anatomiques d'Isabel Piczek : tronc et genoux surélevés.



These traditional burial spices were also anticipated by the OT, as known to the early Church:

“And what will He that is buried in the garden say? “I have gathered My **myrrh** with My **spices**: and again, **Myrrh** and **aloes**, with all chief spices” (Songs 5:1,4:14).³²² Now these are the symbols of the

³²² Compare *Catech.* xiii. 32: “Of this garden I sang of old to My spouse in the Songs, and spoke to her thus. *I am come into My garden, My sister, My spouse.*’ [*Songs. v.1*]; ‘now in the place where He was crucified was a garden’ [*John xix. 41*], and what takest Thou thence? ‘*I have gathered My myrrh.*’ ”

burying; and in the Gospels it is said, “The women came unto the sepulchre bringing the **spices** which they had prepared” ([Luke xxiv.1](#)). Nicodemus also bringing a mixture of **myrrh** and **aloes** ([John xix.39](#)).” [Cyril J, *Catech* 14.11].

When Christ invites the Church to be “buried with Him,” it is an invitation to join Him in the sepulchre, to lie down with Him, and let Him become our funeral bed of spices:

“His cheeks³²³ *are* as a **bed of spices**, *as* sweet flowers: His lips *like* lilies, dropping sweet smelling **myrrh**.” [Songs 5:13]

Commentators have noted that “cheeks” in this verse properly connotes the entire jaw, and the imagery of “spices” refers to the beard making a “bed” for her to lay her face upon. It was common in Middle Eastern cultures for men to groom their beards and perfume them with pride. In this case, Christ’s only “perfume” for His beard was His own blood.³²⁴



[Christ Pantocrator](#) Icon at St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai [ca. AD 550] juxtaposed with the

³²³ Jewish exegetes viewed the plural “cheeks” as symbolic of the two tablets of the covenant. Christian commentators, however, saw in them the **two** distinct covenants.

³²⁴ Eph 5:2 “And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath **given himself** for us an offering and a **sacrifice** to God for a **sweet smelling savour**.”

Shroud image; the brightest images on the Shroud correspond to **blood soaked** areas, based on the iridescent nature of blood

Again, the symbolism pointed to Christ as the embodiment/ fulfillment of the old covenant [the “savour of death”], and the promise of the new [the “savour of life”] in His shed blood. When Christ arose, believers were to rise with Him, saturated with the “bed of spices,” thus becoming “unto God the sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish” [2Cor 2:15].³²⁵

The ceremonial re-sealing of the tomb would become the occasion of the final, grand spectacle:

Tertullian specifically mentions “the **crowd** of visitors”³²⁶ that came to the garden [*De Spectaculis* xxx], probably at the encouragement of Temple authorities, still wanting to make it part of the Passover festivities for pilgrims:

“And early in the morning as the Sabbath was drawing on, there came **a multitude** from Jerusalem and the region round about, **that they might see** the sepulchre that was **sealed**” [*Gosp. Pet* 9.34].

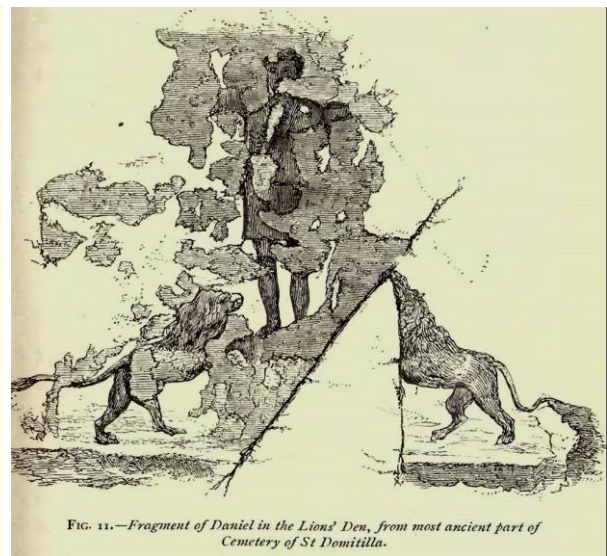
So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, **sealing** the **stone**, and setting a watch. (**Matt 27:66**)³²⁷

In early Christian artwork - when overt evidence of Christianity was punishable by death - the resurrection scene was often replaced (or rather encoded), as *Daniel in the Lion's Den*.

³²⁵ 2Co 2:16 “To the one we are **the savour of death** unto death; and to the other **the savour of life** unto life.” Cp. Php 4:18 “But I have all and abound: I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the things you sent, **an odour of sweetness**, an acceptable sacrifice, **pleasing to God**.”; Re 8:4 “And the **smoke of the incense**, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand.”

³²⁶ Compare “Joseph, Nicodemus, and Cleophas had buried Christ, they laid that stone before the **door of the building** of the tomb. And the high priests, and men of the house of Pilate, went out and set **seals** on the grave **and** on the stone” [*Cave of Treasures* 48b.2].

³²⁷ John alludes to these historical events in light of their spiritual counterparts in the heavenlies. We read in the book of *Revelation*: “to him was given **the key** of the bottomless pit” [9:1] – and this key worked with the “**seal**” set on the pit [Rev 20:3]. The imagery derives from the “sealing” of the tomb described in Mat 27:66, in reverse.

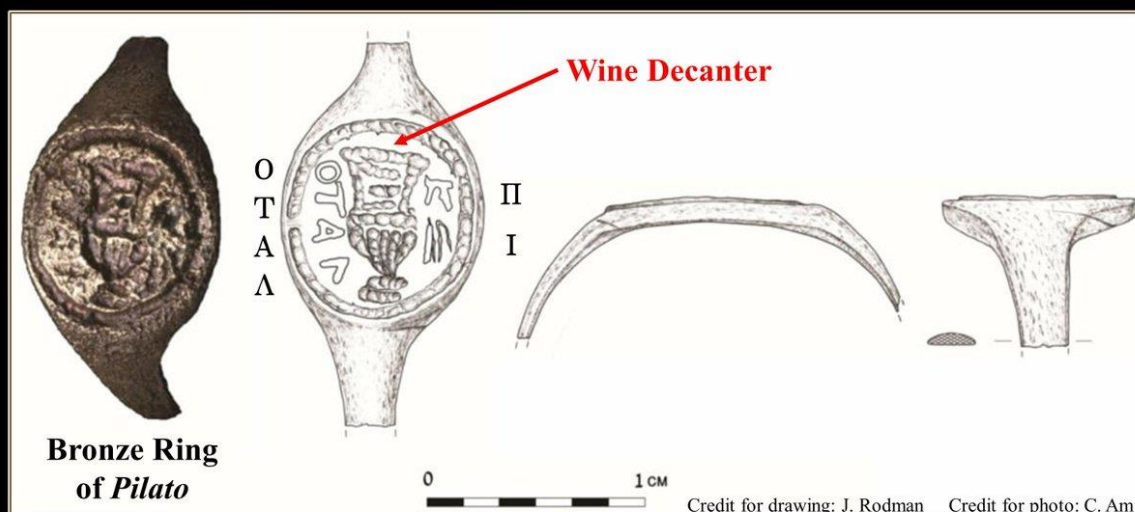


1st century depiction of “Daniel in the Lions’ Den” in Christian catacomb of Domitilla

“And **a stone** was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king **sealed it** with his own **signet**, and with the signet of his lords.” Dan 6:17

Isho’dad of Merv reported the tradition: “they sealed the stone together with the grave with the signet ring of the custodians themselves”- with a *signet of Pilate*, as St. Chrysostom suggests. Joseph’s presence was required as “the bearer of the seal-ring of Pilate,” according to the *Cave of Treasures*.

Signet Ring of ΠΙΛΑΤΟ (Pilate)



This ring was excavated at Herodium during a dig led by Prof. Gideon Forster of Hebrew University after the Six-Day War (1968–69), but only in 2018 was it cleaned and examined carefully. Given that Herodium was the Herodians’ stronghold, this ring almost certainly relates to Pontius Pilate, who interacted with Herod Antipas.



Example of ceremonial seals, left t, at entrance of tomb, and right, on doors to the second of four nested shrines in Tutankhamun's burial chamber.³²⁸

The second aspect of the re-sealing was simply brute security.

<p>A key wrench [bit] was probably cast as a heavy rod [shank] of iron with two grip bars or a circular band [bow] for a handle</p> <p>Roman-era Iron slide-locks with key</p>	<p>Byzantine-era historian Nicephorus notes that the Jews bored through both the stones of the tomb, and fastened them, “after having put seals upon the stone of the tomb; this also they fastened with iron clamps, so that it was impossible to open it by <i>ordinary</i> means”³²⁹ – making a unique key-mechanism necessary.</p>
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Figure 12 a) Roman smart Laconian from Jerash in Jor-dan. b) Haddad axonometric reconstruction of the smart Laconian Lock (After Haddad, 1995, plate 114). c) Recent reconstruction model of smart Laconian Lock

³²⁸ The number of seals set by the combined Roman/Jewish watch is specified by the *Gospel of Peter* [8:33]: “they affixed **seven seals** and pitched a tent there, and guarded it.”

³²⁹ Cited by CORNELIUS À LAPIDE, *Comm on Matt 27:66*. St. Ephrem's *Commentary*: “And blessed are you, Simon; and the **bars of Sheol** will not overpower you.” (Matt. 16:18)



a) Second Homeric type Celtic angled bronze key (length 40.5 cm) from Artemis temple in Lusoi, Arcadia (5th century BCE). The original is at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (Sketch by the author). b) A temple servant carries a giant Homeric key on her shoulder from an Attic votive relief of the fifth century BCE

Hippolytus³³⁰ says

“For this reason the warders of Hades trembled when they saw Him; and the gates of brass and the **bolts of iron** were broken.” [on Luke xiii]³³¹

³³⁰ (c. 170-c. 236) Photius describes him in his *Bibliotheca* (cod. 121) as a disciple of Irenaeus, who was said to be a disciple of Polycarp, who was a famous disciple of the Apostle John. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippolytus_of_Rome

³³¹ RUFINUS, *Historia Eccl.*, ix 6. “If still any doubt, I will bring forward the evidence of the place itself where this was done. The place itself in Jerusalem bears witness to this, and of Golgotha which was rent [as a result of the earthquake] beneath the burden of the cross. So does also that cave - which, when the gates of hell were burst [was rent by the earthquake]” quoting Lucian of Antioch. After eyewitness reports of St Helena’s discoveries began to spread throughout the Christian world, they were memorialized in mosaics of Biblical scenes, depicted in light of the archeological finds. Prudentius in 348 wrote his *Dittochaon* -- (“The Double Testament”) containing 49 quatrains as captions for local basilica murals he had seen. Regarding a mural of the Resurrection, he wrote: “-Neither stone nor the **bars** [claustera The Latin *claustera* has a range of meaning including “lock-bolt” – in fact, *claustrarius* means “locksmith”] **of the grave** have held Christ captive. -Death lies vanquished by Him, He has trodden on the pit. -With Him a multitude of the saints passed to the heavenly regions” [XLIII]. According to the Coptic *Book of the Resurrection*, Christ broke down the doors of hell, and smashed the bolts, and destroyed the doorposts and frames. See British Museum MS. Oriental No. 6804, and Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha*, page 184.

The Church saw Christ's resurrection as a *physical*, as well as a *spiritual* fulfillment of scripture:

“because He has shattered the gates³³² of bronze, and the **bars of iron** He has broken,” Ps. 107.16

“the gates of bronze shall I shatter, and the **bars of iron** shall I break.” Isa 45.2

Just as the “spectacle” of the sealing - and the display of Roman security engineering – was spectacularly overwhelmed by the resurrection, even so, the show of “security forces” became reversed as the guards themselves became witnesses of Christ conquering death. Revelation again picks up on the spiritual significance of this historical reality:

“I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the **keys** of *Hades*³³³ and of *Death*” [Rev 1:18].

The connection between “the gates of hell” Matt 16:18 and the Resurrection in Matt 28:2 was emphasized by Jews of western Europe in their Hebrew versions of Matthew. They did not use *sela* or *petra* for “upon this **rock**” but **נֶחֱלֶה** - “stone”³³⁴ - the same word they used at Matt 28:2 “rolled back the stone **נֶחֱלֶה** from the door.”

In other words, the “gates of Sheol” that could NOT prevail against **the Resurrection**, was the “**stone** that was rolled away” - the testimony that would be the **foundation** of the Faith, or a stumbling stone.

▣ Matt 21:44 “And whosoever shall fall on **this stone** shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”

³³² Cp. Job 17:16 “They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when our rest together is in the dust.” Job 38:17 “Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?” Isa 38:10 “I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of sheol: I am deprived of the residue of my years.”

³³³ In the *Jerusalem Targum*, on Gen 30:22, are these words: “There are four KEYS in the hand of God which he never trusts to angel or seraph. 1. The key of the rain; 2. The key of provision; 3. The key of the sheol; and 4. The key of the barren womb.” In TB *Sanhedrin*, fol. 113, 1, it is said: “When the son of the woman of Sarepta died, Elijah requested that to him might be given the key of the resurrection of the dead. They said to him, there are three KEYS which are not given into the hand of the apostle, the key of life, the key of the rain, and the key of the resurrection of the dead.” See also *Targ. Jon* in Deut. xxviii. 12.. T. Bab. *Taanith*, fol. 2. 1. *Bereshit Rabba*, sect. 73. fol. 64. 3 *Zohar* in Gen. fol. 67. 3. *Pirke Eliezer*, c. 34

³³⁴ E.g., *Shem Tob*: Matt 16:18: Instead of the famous Greek pun, *petrov* / *petra* the Hebrew reads, “You are a stone, and upon you I will build my house of prayer.” The pun consists of the word *Nba* “stone” and *hnba* “I will build.”

▣ 1Pet 2:7-8 “The stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And **a stone of stumbling**, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word.”

In fact, early Christian art depicted the stone over the sepulchre, not as round, but as resembling a **cornerstone**:



11th cent *Bamberg Apocalypse* MS Illumination



10th century illumination in *Benedictional of St Aethelwold*, illustrating Matt 28:2, Matt 28:2, “The angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled³³⁵ back **the stone** from the door, and **sat upon it**.”

▣ **Cyril J Catech** 13:39 “the sepulchre nigh at hand where He was laid; and the **stone** which was laid on the door, which lies **to this day** by the tomb.”14.22 the **stone** also shall rise up against the face of the Jews, for it saw the Lord; even the **stone** wick was then rolled away, itself bears witness to the Resurrection, lying there **to this day**.³³⁶

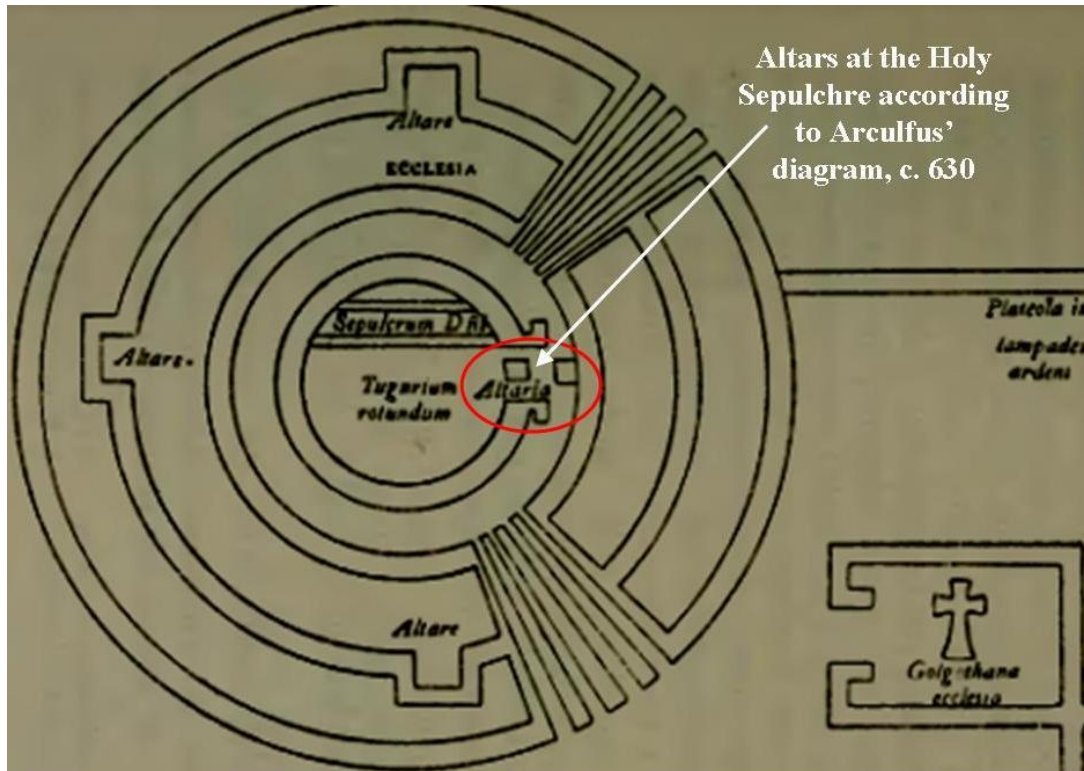
In fact, according to Arculfus, c. AD 630:

“But among these things, it seems that one ought to tell briefly about the stone, mentioned above, which was rolled to the mouth of the

³³⁵ Also [Mark 15:46](#); in both verses, the Greek word *proskulio*, the only two usages of it in the New Testament, can mean “rolled” or simply “moved.” See Kloner, Amos “Did a Rolling Stone Close Jesus’ Tomb?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 25.5 [1999]: pp. 22-29, 76.

³³⁶ *Sahidic Falling Asleep of Mary*, frag. V. “Now the disciples [of Christ] and the multitude of the faithful were going forth secretly to the tomb by night, praying; so that many who were troubled by unclean spirits came, that they might but touch **the stone** that was at the door of the tomb.”

Tomb of the Lord,...broken and divided into two parts, the smaller of which, rough hewn with tools, is seen placed as **a square altar** in the round church, described above, before the mouth of that often-mentioned cabin, that is, the Lord's Tomb; while the larger part of that stone, equally hewn around, stands fixed in the eastern part of that church as another four-sided altar under linen cloths.”³³⁷



Cyril of Jerusalem saw the stone at the door in light of OT foreshadowing
 “But we seek to be told plainly where he was buried. Is his tomb [ταφος] then made with hands? Is it like the tombs of kings, raised above the ground? Is the sepulchre [μνεμα] made of stones joined together, and what is laid upon it? Tell us, O Prophets, the exact truth concerning his tomb [ταφος], also where it is placed and where we shall seek it? And they say, “Look into the solid rock which you have known” (Isa 51.1); “Look in,” and behold. What kind of door has the sepulchre? Again, another prophet says. “They cut off my life, in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me” (Jer 23:53). [*Catech* 13:35]

³³⁷ARCULFUS, *DE LOCIS SANCTIS*. lib.I, iv; ch Venerable bede’s description: “The stone which was placed at the mouth of the Tomb has been broken in two, the smaller part standing as a square altar before the mouth of the Tomb, while the larger part stands in the eastern side of the church under the linen cloths, **also forming a four-sided altar**. The colour of the [stone of the] Tomb and of the Sepulchre is white mixed with red [n.b. Bede distinguishes between the Tomb and the coffin-like *arcosolium* of the Sepulchre]

The *pièce de résistance* of the entire burial spectacle was the stationing of a guard at the tomb,³³⁸ along with the official observers.

Pilate said to them, "Take the military guard and go and make it as secure as you can." Matt 27: 65



Mt Athos Fresco depicting some of the catatonic military contingent guarding the tomb

In manner similar to Peter's guard, the usual *quaternion* [Acts 12:4], would be quadrupled, so that each quaternion could take one of the four "watches" of night, while the rest bivouacked in proximity to the tomb.³³⁹ Such rotations were used to eliminate the risk of "falling asleep on duty." While Pilate's support of the watch was an excuse to display military might and intimidation, he was, again, merely fulfilling prophecy. Christ Himself, in the person of Joshua [=Jesus in Greek, cp. Heb 4:8, KJV], had commanded the placement of the guard:

³³⁸ According to the ancient *Gospel according to the Hebrews*, temple-servants were stationed [Jerome, ON FAMOUS MEN 2], and [according to the *Gospel of Peter*], "with them came elders and scribes to the sepulchre, And having rolled a large stone, all who were there, together with the centurion and the soldiers,.....and pitched a tent there and guarded it." [8]

³³⁹ "It is read in the *Gospel of the Nazoraeans* that the gladiators appropriated *four* soldiers to scourge the Lord hard enough to [cause] an effusion of blood from his entire body. They appropriated those same soldiers still to crucify him just as it is said in John 19"³³⁹ (From the *History of the Passion of the Lord*, folio 44 recto) John 19:23 "Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made *four* parts, to *every soldier* a part" This Roman contingent was "delivered to them, armed men that they might sit over against the cave and guard it day and night." Variant to Matthew 27:65 in the "Zion Gospel" Edition [Schneemelcher *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and related writings* p149, 160-162]

And Joshua said, “Roll great stones upon the mouth of the cave, and set men by it for to keep שְׁמֶרֶם them.” [Josh 10:18]



Ivory panel carving showing one shift of the *quaternion* guarding the Tomb

The reason? This very watch would become the irrefutable witness of the Resurrection:

“Make ye mention to the nations; behold, publish against Jerusalem, that **watchers** נִצְרִים come **from a far country**, and give out their voice against the cities of Judah. As **keepers** שְׁמֶרֶי of a field, are they against her round about.” [Jer 4:16-17]

With many levels of ironies, Jeremiah prophesies that foreign occupiers would provide convicting testimony against disbelieving citizens of Judah. The word used for “watchers” here is the same term used by the Temple authorities in Acts 24:5 – “Nazarenes” – the same term still used in modern Israeli Hebrew for “Christians.”

Just as prophesied, the testimony of the “watchers” was “published.”